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Guide to
Fantastic Video

No. 95

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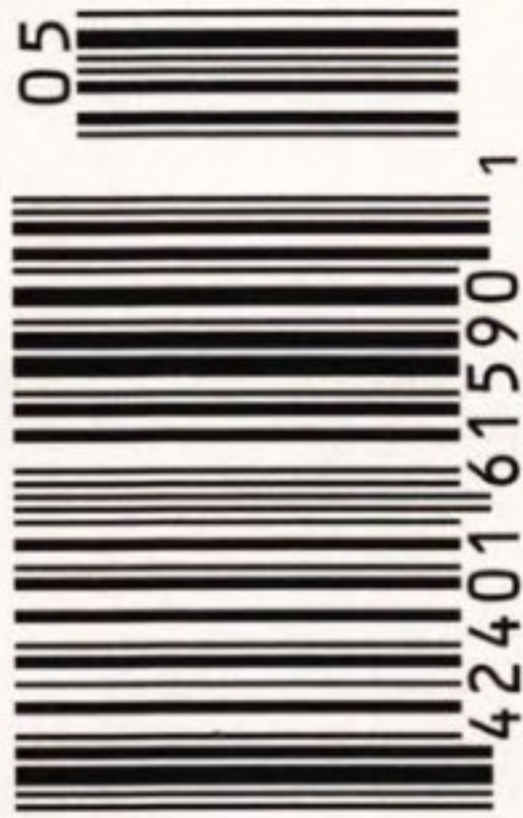
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Fantastic Video

No. 95 / MAY 2003

"Young blood must have its course, lad,
And every dog his day."

—Charles Kingsley, "The Water Babies"

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six hemorrhaging horror hits from
the heyday of Hemisphere Pictures!
That's right—a half dozen hits (more or
less) of Filipino fright, all now available
as Image Entertainment's "Blood
Collection": **THE BLOOD DRINKERS!**
BRIDES OF BLOOD! MAD DOCTOR OF
BLOOD ISLAND! BEAST OF BLOOD!
BLOOD OF THE VAMPIRES (aka **CURSE**
OF THE VAMPIRES) and the *faux* Filipino
BRAIN OF BLOOD! It's *increddddddible!*
It's *unbelievvvvvvable!*

Special Offer: Those brave enough to
stay through the entire article will receive
a free bonus: Shane's shocking appraisal
of Independent-International's adamantly
awful **HORROR OF THE BLOOD MONSTERS**
—also available from Image!

Front: A green blood-spattered victim
of the **MAD DOCTOR OF BLOOD**
ISLAND (1969), available on DVD
from Image Entertainment!
(Shake cover photo in front of face
for maximum effect.)

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KENNEL

ANTHONY AMBROGIO's short story "Solipsism" is due to be posted on www.stillwatersjournal.com.

JOHN CHARLES regrets that he was born too late to take "The Oath of Green Blood." Visit his website HONG KONG DIGITAL at www.dighkmovies.com.

BILL COOKE teaches a course in the history of horror cinema at the University of South Carolina.

SHANE M. DALLMANN, a living, breathing creature of the cosmic entity, has long been prepared to safely view the unnatural green-blooded ones without fear of contamination.

JOE DANTE recently screened a rough cut of his new movie for the execs at Warner Bros.

CHARLIE LARGENT has begun work on a book about the ARC/AIP films of Roger Corman.

TIM LUCAS has written a book about Mario Bava that's nearly as long as WAR AND PEACE.

KIM NEWMAN's story "Egyptian Avenue" has been chosen for inclusion in Stephen Jones'

anthology BEST NEW HORROR and Ellen Datlow's THE YEAR'S BEST FANTASY AND HORROR.

GARY L. PRANGE is contributing two chapters to VAMPIROS AND MONSTRUOS, a book about Mexican horror and fantasy which Mirek Lipinski is editing for Midnight Marquee.

RICHARD HARLAND SMITH recently spent time with Soupy Sales, who reports that, although he's on a starch-free diet, he can still eat bleach and detergent.

NATHANIEL THOMPSON is preparing a second volume of DVD DELIRIUM for FAB Press. Visit his MONDO DIGITAL review site at www.mondo-digital.com.

REBECCA UMLAND recently published an essay on David Lynch's THE STRAIGHT STORY in WRAPPED IN PLASTIC, while **SAM UMLAND** co-authored (with Karl Wessel) an essay on Philip K. Dick's "Man, Android, and Machine" for the book PREFIGURING CYBERCULTURE (MIT Press, 2002).

DOUGLAS E. WINTER tells us that this issue's "Audio Watchdog" column is #75! Atta boy, Doug!

VW THANKS:

A&E Home Video (Suzanne Dobson), Amusement Films (Pat Bishow), Anchor Bay Entertainment (Perry Martin, Maral Kaloustian/Sue Procko PR), Blue Underground (William Lustig, Joyce Shen), Juanita Bowman, Criterion (R. O'Donnell, Marc Walkow), William Dallmann, the late Brother Theodore Gottlieb, Bruce Holecheck, Image Entertainment (Spencer Savage), Independent-International (Samuel M. Sherman), Kinowelt Home Entertainment (Joerg Bauer), Limelight Editions (Jenna Young), McFarland and Company, MGM Home Entertainment (Steve Wegner), Mondo Macabro (Pete Tombs), Poker Industries (Michael Basden), Something Weird Video (Mike Vraney, Lisa Petrucci), Universal Studios Home Video (Evan Fong), USA Home Entertainment, Warner Home Video (Karen Penhale), Xploited Cinema (Tom Simonelli), our subscribers, correspondents, distributors and fellow partakers in the Oath of the Green Blood!

PHOTO SOURCES:

A&E Home Video (42-47), Amusement Films (13), Anchor Bay Entertainment (61), Criterion (4), Image Entertainment/Independent-International (front, inside, 23, 26-41, back), Kinowelt (5-11), Mondo Macabro (67, 68), Poker Industries (64, 65), Something Weird Video (14-20, 53), Universal Studios Home Video (48, 50), USA Home Entertainment (57), Warner Home Video (55-56, 59, 78), Samuel Z. Archive (22). **ARTWORK:** Pete Fitzgerald (21). **LOGO & COVER FORMAT:** Radomir Perica (International Design Studio, Bethesda MD).

This issue is dedicated to our friend Samuel M. Sherman—and to the late Ivan Rassimov.

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THE WATCHDOG BARKS



SINCE DOUG WINTER is using his column to celebrate the Best Soundtracks of 2002, I thought I would take this page to honor my own picks for the Best DVDs of 2002. I don't usually do this, but I've been so preoccupied with prepping my Bava manuscript for layout that I haven't had time to write proper reviews of some extremely important titles, and I wanted to make my enthusiasm for them known. I still intend to give some of these fuller treatment in an upcoming issue, but for now, these were my favorite releases of the past year:

1. **CONTEMPT** (Criterion) This has long been one of the most desperately needed films on disc; only a cropped and badly dubbed version previously available on VHS and LD. Not only has Criterion delivered the ideal anamorphic, subtitled transfer, but also a wealth of extras (including two promotional films scripted by Alain Robbe-Grillet). How many times can you say that a disc's menu gave you chills? This one delivers Georges Delerue's main theme in its entirety—and in stereo.

2. **EUGENIE—THE STORY OF HER JOURNEY INTO PERVERSION** (Blue Underground) The most eagerly awaited "lost" film in the annals of Eurocult finally arrives, and though my expectations for it were high, this presentation exceeded them. How wonderful to make the acquaintance of a new classic that already exists in its definitive presentation!

3. **JULIET OF THE SPIRITS** (Criterion) **8 1/2** was also mind-blowing, but being a December 2001 release, it just misses consideration. But here, even moreso, is a case where Presentation equals Revelation. **JULIET OF THE SPIRITS** was never one of my favorite Fellini films before, but I had never seen a print this complete and in its intended Technicolor hues before. And the interview in which Fellini discusses the importance of LSD to his 1960s work is fascinating.

4. **DANGER MAN** aka **SECRET AGENT, VOLUMES 3-6** (A&E) Now here's a dark horse! But nearly every episode in these multi-disc sets stands as a miniature masterpiece of British filmmaking and espionage cinema. Patrick McGeehan may be the compelling TV actor of the 1960s, and **VOLUME 5**'s "The Man on the Beach," guest-stars Barbara Steele. An important recovery of a series nearly forgotten by most Americans—and superior to **THE PRISONER**, in my opinion.

5. **THE COMPLETE MONTEREY POP FESTIVAL** (Criterion Collection) I love this release, but I dropped it down a peg or two because it doesn't really deliver what the title promises. This isn't the entire weekend festival (would that it were!), but it's three discs capturing a critical moment in 20th Century cultural history. I would probably have paid the asking price for any one of the three discs included here. The nearly two hours of outtakes is even more exciting than the new 5.1 remix of the main feature.

6. **THE OUTER LIMITS** (MGM) Season One of the most literate and beautifully crafted fantasy series of all time. Now where's Season Two?

7. **CQ** (MGM) Anyone with an interest in the Golden Age of Italian Fantasy should greet Roman Coppola's directorial debut as a vindication—not only of their own interest in the genre, but of the style of filmmaking which characterized that period. A dazzling movie, erupting with visual imagination and a palpable love of cinema, and the disc is packed with interesting extras, too.

8. **HERCULES IN THE HAUNTED WORLD** (Fantoma) As the world awaited Image Entertainment's indefinitely postponed **KILL, BABY... KILL!**, Fantoma stole top honors for the year's best Mario Bava release. It's missing the film's prologue, but the movie's actually better without it, and the presence of both the English and Italian audio tracks, offers an education in how this movie was altered for US consumption. Eye candy of the first order.

9. **THE OBLONG BOX / SCREAM AND SCREAM AGAIN** (MGM) These are better films than horror fans commonly acknowledge, and MGM has very quietly issued this Midnite Movies double feature (priced under \$15!) with two restored remasters. The former contains footage never before seen in America (including some nudity), and the latter contains the original soundtrack, the absence of which has bedeviled most of its video and cable incarnations for a full decade.

10. **CASTLE OF BLOOD** (Synapse Films) It's not perfect—the movie has its creaky moments—but how wonderful to have the uncut French version available, and the subtitles point out footage cut from the US release that no one ever suspected was missing! Yes, I wrote the liner notes for #s 2, 8 and 10, but that just proves I was sweet on these to begin with...

..... **Tim Lucas**

WATCHDOG NEWS

A Beauty of a Beast



By Tim Lucas



ack in "The Letter-box" of VW #17, we published a missive from reader Stephen

Cooke of Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, who wrote in response to our review of The Voyager Company's "Criterion Collection" laserdisc of Jean Cocteau's **BEAUTY AND THE BEAST** [*Le Belle et la Bête*, 1946]. Stephen expressed dismay that Criterion had not included

the film's original French main titles sequence, featuring Cocteau himself writing the credits on a chalkboard, which he said "adds greatly to the film's charm." We responded to Stephen's letter by saying, "I'd say this calls for a repressing. How about it, Voyager?"

Ten years later, our question has received an answer worth waiting for, in the form of Criterion's new deluxe DVD of the Cocteau classic (\$39.95,

92m 48s). The title sequence, which runs exactly 2m, is just the first of many boons to the new release; it not only features Cocteau, but the scribbled credits for Jean Marais and Josette Day are promptly

Josette Day and Jean Marais are more enchanting than ever in Criterion's lustrous new DVD of Jean Cocteau's BEAUTY AND THE BEAST.

erased by the actors themselves, dressed as themselves (Marais is first seen roughhousing with a dog), and the sequence ends with a view of the clapboard as "Take One" is called. The restored elements have been treated to an absolutely magnificent high definition 1.33 transfer, which breathes new life into the film's minutest details of wardrobe and set design.

In addition to the original French soundtrack, the disc includes a Dolby Digital 5.1 presentation of Philip Glass's opera *LA BELLE ET LA BÊTE*, which unfolds in perfect synch with the film. Other extras: separate audio commentaries by Arthur Knight and Sir Christopher Frayling, an interview with cameraman Henri Alekan, a 1964 French TV profile of makeup artist Hagop Arakelian (who gave us the greatest werewolf ever, right?); *SCREENING AT THE MAJESTIC* (26m 45s), a fabulous 1997 documentary that interviews and reunites members of the cast and crew, including stars Jean Marais and Mila Parély (Adelaide, Belle's snooty sister); a lavish 32 page booklet reprinting the original fable by Mme.

Leprince de Beaumont, a stills gallery, and still a great deal more. In short, this is one of those rare discs that deserve a shelf entirely to itself. Call it a shrine. Full review coming soon.

Kinowelt Does It Better: German DVDs Go a Step Further

*By Nathaniel Thompson
and Tim Lucas*

The German DVD label Kinowelt Home Entertainment—the first company anywhere in the world to release *CITIZEN KANE* and *KING KONG* on DVD—have issued a number of mainstream American horror and science fiction films on Region 2 PAL DVDs, which either remain unreleased here in the States on disc, or include choice supplementary features that were not included on domestic releases.

A good example of what makes the Kinowelt discs so attractive is Lewis Teague's Stephen King omnibus *CAT'S EYE* (as *Katzenauge*; 1985, Kinowelt #500437, DD-2.0/SS/MA/16:9/LB/+, €24.99, 94m 8s).

Encouraged by the boxoffice receipts for Stephen King adaptations in the early 1980s, producer Dino De Laurentiis recruited the prolific novelist to adapt his own works for the screen, resulting in a pair of releases which opened within eight months of each other in 1985: *CAT'S EYE* and *SILVER BULLET*. Neither film proved to be an unqualified hit, but they are undeniably more enjoyable and ultimately successful than the following year's third and final King/De Laurentiis outing, *MAXIMUM OVERDRIVE*, which was largely responsible for the bankruptcy of DEG Entertainment.

The first of this odd collaboration to be released, *CAT'S EYE* was also the most convoluted and troubled production, an uneven attempt at *CREEPSHOW*-style anthology horror geared for a more family-friendly audience. The decision to attempt a multi-story format seems appropriate considering De Laurentiis' recent affiliation with producer Milton Subotsky, best known for his string of successful Amicus horror omnibus films. Several King cinema alumni were recruited for *CAT'S EYE*, including director Lewis Teague (*CUJO*) and young

Fans of feline fright everywhere should spin up Kinowelt's new disc of CAT'S EYE.





Mary D'Arcy, one of the tormented denizens of CAT'S EYE, an unlikely collaboration of Stephen King, Dino De Laurentiis and Milton Subotsky.

Drew Barrymore, a saving grace in the previous year's misguided **FIRESTARTER**. Rumors of jettisoned stories, elaborate re-editing, and production difficulties plagued the film, and the strain is most evident in the awkward framing device, which follows a resourceful stray cat across America and through the terrain of three King stories, two adapted from 1978's **NIGHT SHIFT** and one written specifically for the film.

"Quitters, Inc." chronicles the efforts of Dick Morrison (James Woods) to quit smoking with the aid of a mysterious agency which uses such extreme methods as electrocution and intimidation to achieve its results. Featuring a memorable punchline, an unnerving turn by Alan King, and a twitchy performance by a circa-**VIDEODROME** Woods, the story survives its translation to the big screen fairly well despite an overly protracted length and some bizarre lapses in taste, such as bebop music played

over imagery of Wood's wife and a cat subjected to a therapeutic shock chamber. Less successful is "The Ledge," in which Johnny Norris (Robert Hays) is forced by cuckolded gangster Cressner (Kenneth McMillan) to traverse the outside of a tall building via its narrow ledge. Again boasting a nasty sting in the tale, this suspenseful, horror-free narrative obviously works on the primal level of exploiting viewers' acrophobia but would feel more at home as an episode of **ALFRED HITCHCOCK PRESENTS** than as a segment in a horror film. The third and most confounding of the bunch, "The General," finds the cat (who played a minor role in the other stories) taking center stage by reaching its destiny, Amanda (Barrymore), who is in danger from a grotesque, tiny troll which slips out from her wall every night and tries to steal her breath. Amanda's parents (Candy Clark and James Naughton) battle over the cat's presence, while a battle

of quasi-epic proportions is meanwhile brewing at night in the little girl's bedroom. Again hobbled by strange musical choices (mainly an on-the-nose reliance on The Police's "Every Breath You Take"), the story is slow going at first but pays off with a feisty climax. Unfortunately, the sappy and perplexing coda would have been better off on the cutting room floor, which is where much of the film's other footage apparently landed as well.

Kinowelt's disc sports a commentary by Teague which offers only a few tantalizing references to the other incarnations of his film. He discusses the original plans for a more intricate linking story with Barrymore's character, including a detailed explanation of her presence at the outset. Instead, the final cut kicks off with a series of jokey King references, with the cat weaving through an obstacle course including a rabid Saint Bernard and a red Plymouth Fury. Other actors have mentioned their roles in the film over the years, with Patti LuPone the most prominent name of those whose work never made it to the screen. However, Teague largely sidesteps the issue of how much was shot and why those scenes were never used; instead he focuses more on the production aspects, praising his collaborators' work and detailing the nature of shooting at the then-new Wilmington, North Carolina studios, a cinematic playground most notable for such films as **BLUE VELVET** and **THE CROW**. The DVD also contains the theatrical trailer, three Dolby Digital surround audio tracks in English, German, or Italian, and optional subtitles in German, English, Italian, Dutch, Norwegian, Swedish, Finnish, and Danish. The image quality from an immaculate

anamorphic transfer, struck by Studio Canal, is excellent throughout and restores famed cinematographer Jack Cardiff's original scope framing, which measures out to 2.37:1. As with many Canal transfers, the dialogue sounds duller than it should and sometimes becomes muddy to the point of incoherence, but Alan Silvestri's synth-driven score (which has not fared well over the passing of time) sounds punchy and is largely confined to the front speakers. The same transfer was later released as a US Region 1 disc by Warner (WAR65247DVD) with the trailer and commentary, but without the multiple language options.

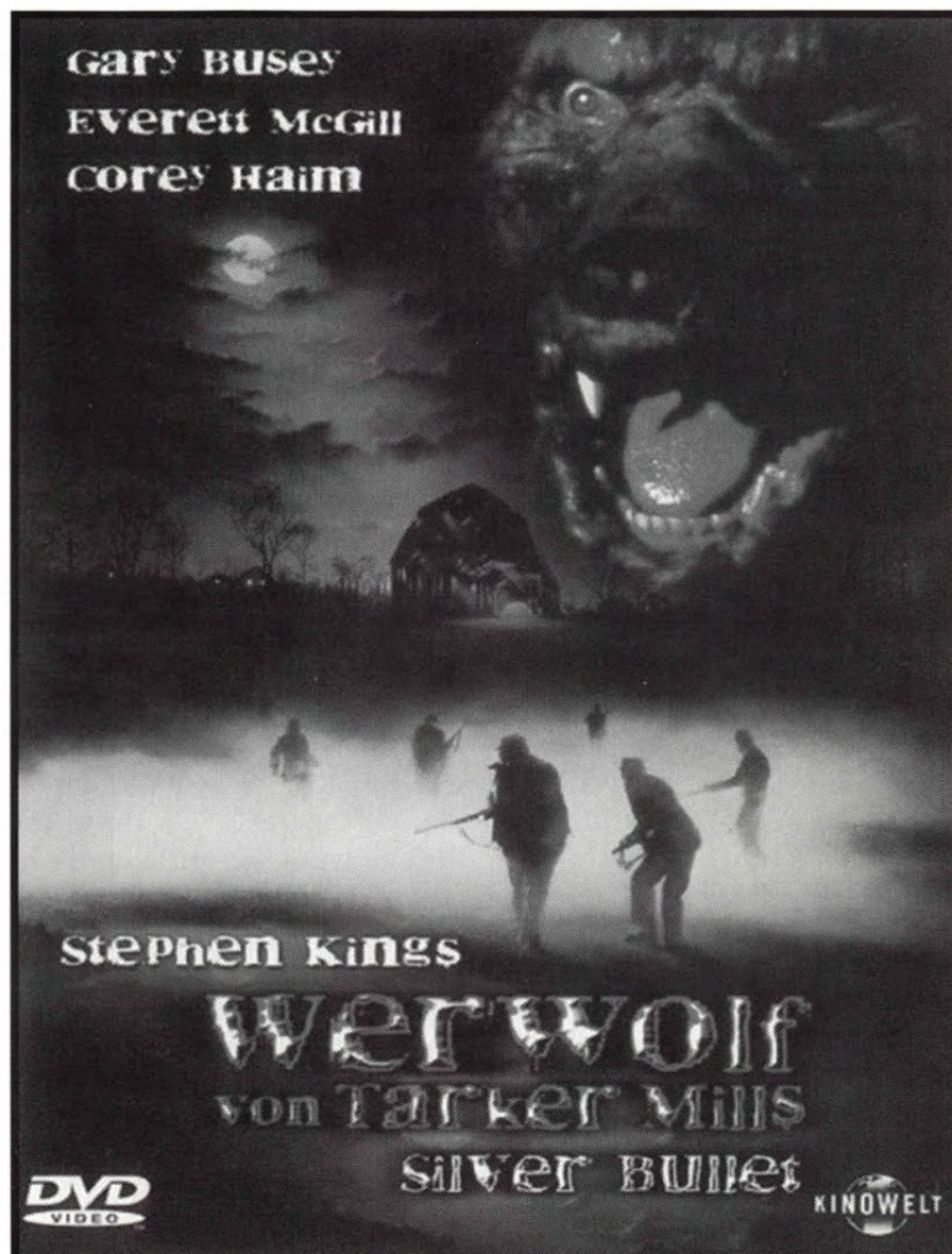
Upping the mawkish quotient even further than **CAT'S EYE**'s Barrymore story, the same year's Halloween release, **SILVER BULLET** (1985, Kinowelt #500281, DD-2.0/MA/16:9/LB/+, 94m 52s), found King streamlining his episodic novella *CYCLE OF THE WEREWOLF* through the eyes of wheelchair-bound teen Marty Coslaw (Corey Haim). In 1976, the small town of Tarker's Mills is terrorized by a series of gruesome killings with a wolf-like animal seemingly responsible. Marty's sister (Megan Follows) and alcoholic Uncle Red (top-billed Gary Busey) are the first to accept Marty's hypothesis that a supernatural presence may be responsible, while the town sheriff (Terry O'Quinn) and preacher (Everett McGill) offer their own forms of assistance or hindrance. Unlike his book, King's screenplay unmasks the culprit fairly early in the game and twists the story into a cat-and-mouse construct with the Coslaw clan eventually facing off against the hairy menace, represented by a less-than-convincing shaggy wolf suit.

While previous King adaptations more or less coped with his

idiosyncratic dialogue and emphatic writing style (with a notorious emphasis on italics and parentheses) by smoothing it out into film-friendly dialogue, **SILVER BULLET** was the first film to translate his prose style verbatim into a screenplay, with often disastrous results. The trite narration is a sign of clumsy things to come, and anyone who has suffered through the ear-punishing dialogue of King's TV work like **THE SHINING**, **ROSE RED**, and **STORM OF THE CENTURY** will find the source of the problem right here. Fortunately, the visuals often compensate for the script's shortcomings, thanks in no small part to the

contributions of director of photography Armando Nannuzzi (**THE DAMNED**, **LUDWIG**), who transforms a simple manhunt through fog-shrouded woods into a masterful, fantastic landscape of light and shadow.

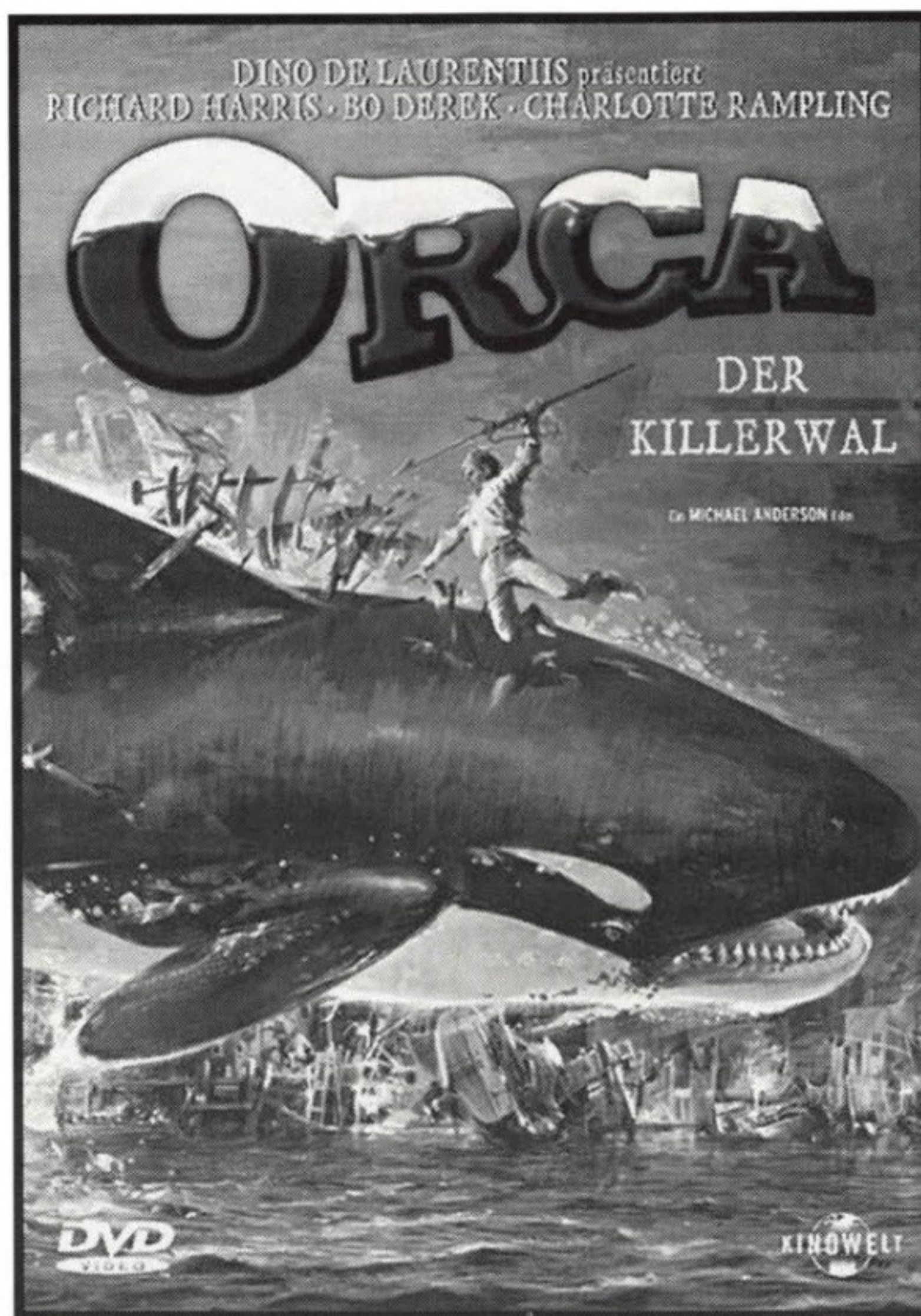
While previous home video versions were a murky mess, the DVD transfer prepared by Canal offers an overdue chance to appreciate the film on its best behavior, with its modest virtues easier to appreciate. The Kinowelt disc offers a solid anamorphic transfer (2.34:1), the action-filled trailer (which touts King as "the master of mystery and suspense" rather than exploiting the horror angle), the



same array of language options, and a commentary track by director Daniel Attias, now working as a television director on such series as *SIX FEET UNDER*. Attias keeps his discussion moving at a fast clip, humorously relating the problem of adapting King's "calendar" into a coherent story while glossing over some of the obvious plot flaws. Like Teague, he also makes note of the Wilmington locales and offers a few wry observations about the difficulties of relocating a New England script to a Southern setting. In contrast, the American DVD from Paramount (#PAR-018274DVD, \$24.99)

offers only the film itself, with no extras to speak of. The German disc cover promotes the film as *Werwolf von Tarker Mills* (sic), though the transfer thankfully retains the original English title.

Another Kinowelt title from De Laurentiis is **ORCA** (1977, Kinowelt #500407, DD-1.0/16:9/LB/+, 88m 17s), which hails from the producer's nature-gone-amok period. The killer whale is one of the most intelligent and vengeance-prone species on earth, at least according to marine expert Rachel Bedford (Charlotte Rampling) during her opening lecture in this wonderfully loopy horror-adventure from British helmer-for-hire Michael Anderson (**LOGAN'S RUN**). **ORCA** mixes random chunks of Herman Melville's *MOBY DICK* with a hoary revenge conceit revolving around morally conflicted sea hunter Captain Nolan (Richard Harris), whose attempts to harpoon a male killer



whale instead result in the death of the whale's mate and unborn calf. The outraged surviving whale tracks a remorseful Nolan to a nearby town where it wreaks havoc, including the consumption of Bo Derek's broken leg in the film's most notorious sequence. After much existential anguish, Nolan (who similarly lost his wife and child thanks to the hand of fate) and whale face off in an icy, Frankensteinian showdown in the arctic.

Usually lumped in with the seemingly endless **JAWS** imitations of the late 1970s, the wholly unbelievable contrivances of **ORCA** seemed like the natural, ludicrous conclusion of this cycle, at least until Universal's own big shark series cannibalized the same storyline ten years later for the even sillier **JAWS: THE REVENGE**. Even deriving its title from **JAWS'** nautical vessel and sporting an apropos curtain raiser which

finds the title character munching on a predatory shark, Anderson's film at least has the sense to avoid the commercially driven shock pacing of Spielberg's film and instead tries to pull off a poetic meditation on grief, loss, and retribution. Unfortunately, one of the protagonists harboring these elements is a friendly-faced whale bound to invoke memories of Shamu; however, if you can surmount that overwhelming obstacle, the film does offer some rewards. Harris—who tended to sleepwalk through his roles during this period—seems to relish the complexity of his character and wrings

some real dramatic juice from his numerous showdowns even when saddled with dialogue like "You revengeful son of a bitch!" However, the film's greatest strengths are the scenic wide-screen photography (particularly the eerie closing scene) and—apart from the mawkish "We Are One" end credits song—Ennio Morricone's ravishing score, composed the same year as his admirable work for another high profile misfire, **EXORCIST II: THE HERETIC**.

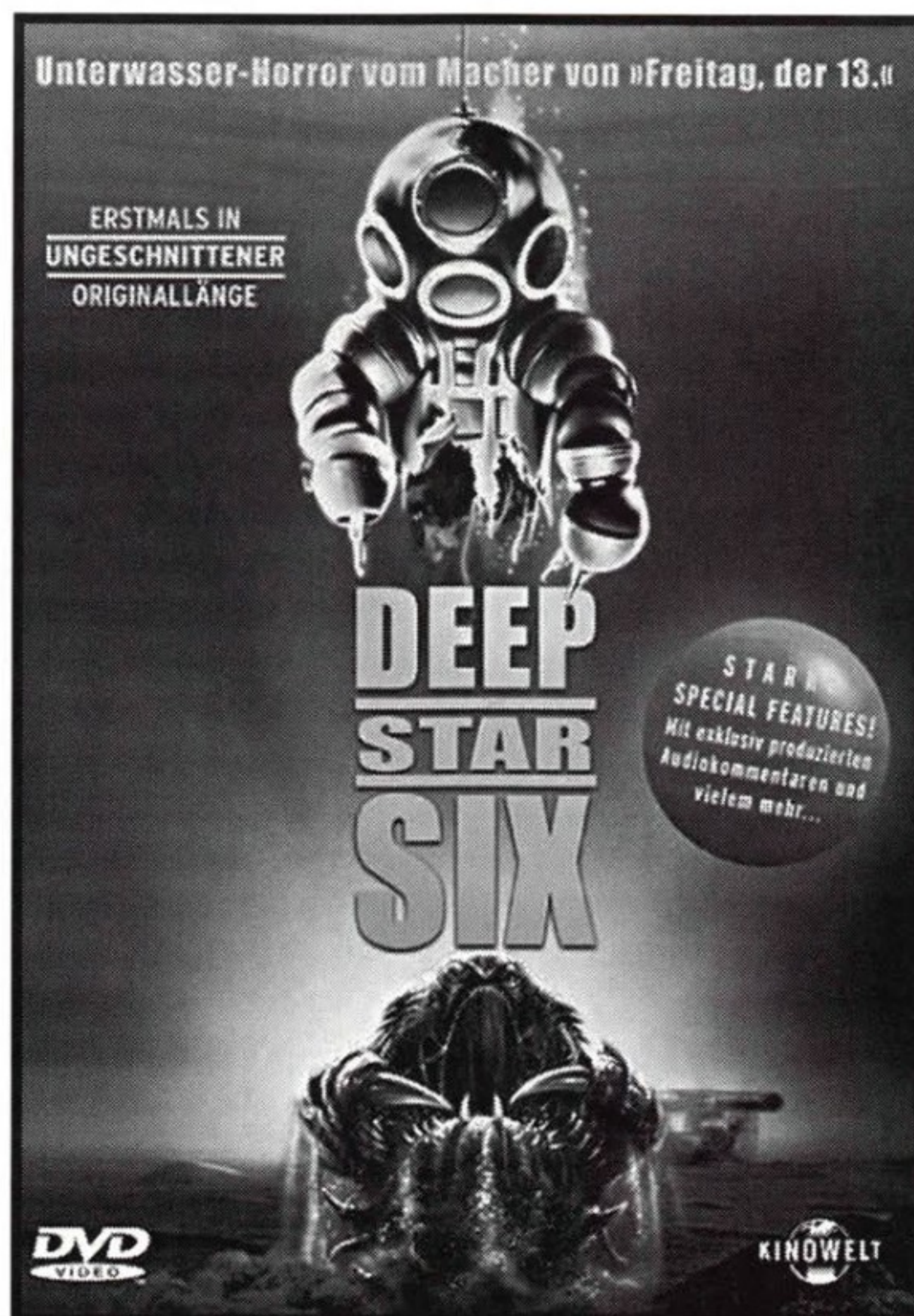
Kinowelt's **ORCA** offers a solid anamorphic transfer prepared by Studio Canal, preserving the original 2.35:1 framing with an admirable color palette and better black levels than the less impressive Dutch disc from Bridge Pictures Classics. Subtitles are available in English, German, Spanish, Dutch, Norwegian, Portuguese, Turkish, Danish, and Finnish, while the film's American theatrical trailer

comprises the only notable extra. Considering Paramount's history of acquiring Canal transfers for its own domestic releases like **DON'T LOOK NOW**, an eventual US release is possible. Interestingly, Paramount expanded the film's title to **ORCA, THE KILLER WHALE** and, like the previous Spielberg film, somehow coaxed a PG rating from the MPAA despite the aforementioned whale miscarriage, which no doubt traumatized countless theater-loads of impressionable children.

For those seeking more horrors from the ocean depths, **DEEP STAR SIX** (1989, Kinowelt #500394, DD-2.0/16:9/LB/+, 95m 4s) is a middling, inaugural entry in the short-lived sea-movie craze of 1989, which was followed by **LEVIATHAN, LORDS OF THE DEEP** and, most notably, James Cameron's **THE ABYSS**. Sean Cunningham's slick but impersonal mixture of nautical thrills and trendy gore was first released on DVD in the US via Artisan's lackluster standard-framed, bare bones edition, which has been rendered obsolete by Kinowelt's German alternative. A treat for Region 2-capable viewers, the disc offers a solid showcase for this thinly plotted study of a ragtag underwater naval crew developing a nuclear facility, which upsets the domain of a vicious monster that becomes bent on destroying them all.

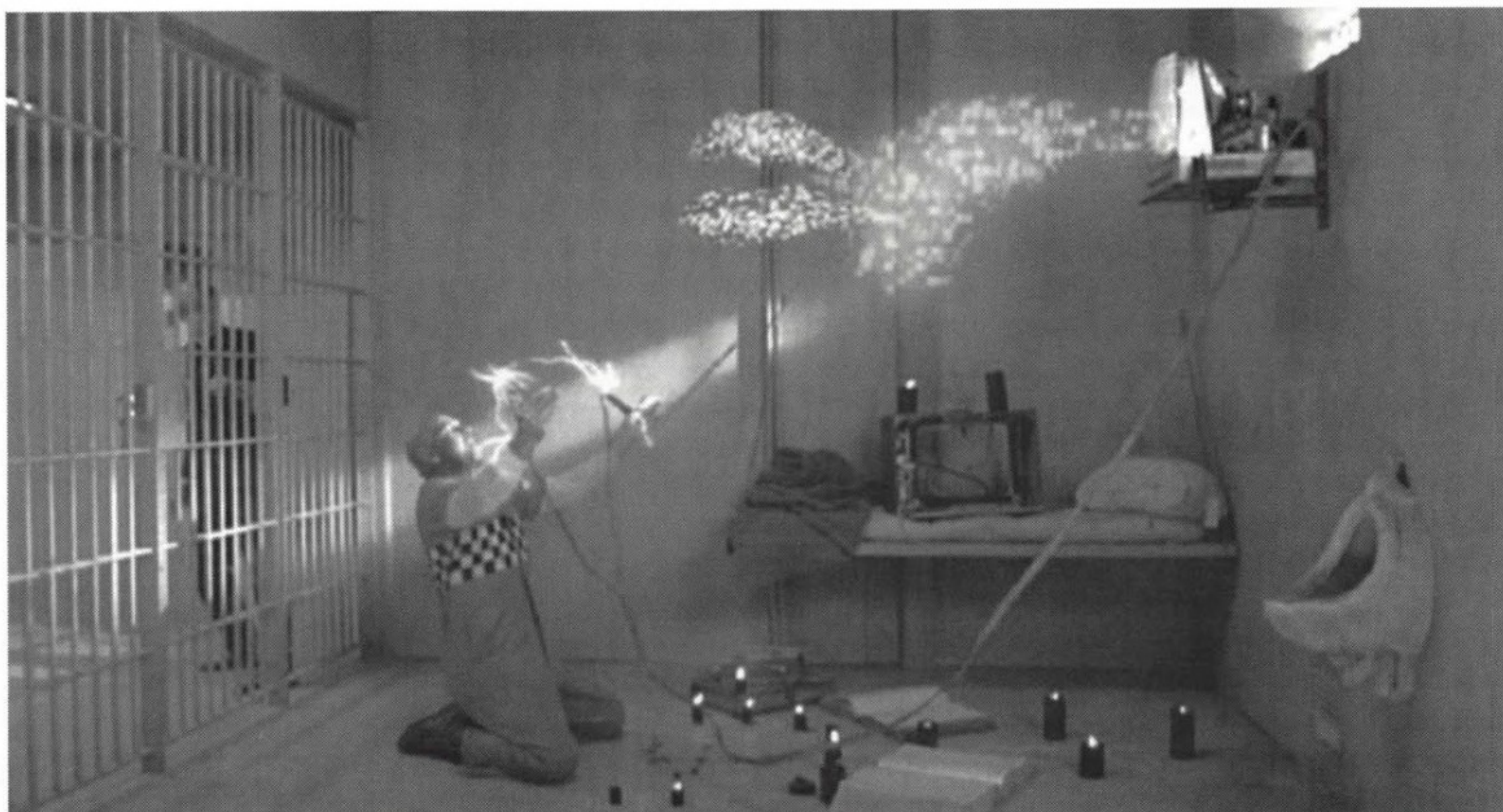
Comprised of TV actors and sporting the usual low budget horror suspects (including composer Harry Manfredini, one of Cunningham's **FRIDAY THE**

13TH cohorts, and reliable cinematographer Mac Ahlberg), **DEEP STAR SIX** is the very definition of a painless popcorn muncher, at least offering more grisly thrills than its competitors. For what it's worth, Miguel Ferrer walks off with acting honors as a borderline psychopath with all of the juiciest lines. Skillfully shot in 2.35:1 Panavision (which cleverly obscures some of the more lacking special effects), **DEEP STAR SIX** looks better than its paltry budget might indicate and certainly benefits from the more spacious framing. Image quality is excellent with beautifully saturated blues (in every imaginable shade), a great improvement over the comparatively subdued Artisan disc. The Dolby surround track (in English or German) offers a fairly active mix for a 1989 film; surround activity is mostly limited to the score and ambient gurgling effects.



Exclusives to the German disc are headed by a commentary track with Cunningham and special effects supervisor James Isaac; obviously, the film's visual effects receive most of the attention here, though the difficulties of shooting in and around water make for a few diverting stories along the way. Other extras include the theatrical trailer, a 2m 32s promotional featurette, a 3m 50s production short, and a less-slickly-edited compilation of 4m 15s of behind the scenes material, with the first two sharing some of the same interview footage of Cunningham and the cast.

Cunningham's former associate Wes Craven receives his due attention from Kinowelt with a deluxe presentation of his 1989 effort **SHOCKER** (Kinowelt #500273, DD-2.0/SS/MA/16:9/LB/ST/+, 105m 21s). After losing control of the lucrative and increasingly comedy-driven **A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET** series, Craven devised a villain to rival Freddy Krueger in the form of Horace Pinker (THE X-FILES' Mitch Pileggi), a burly, foul-mouthed TV repairman whose passion for murder extends beyond the grave. Complete with a hackneyed catch phrase ("No more Mr. Nice Guy!") and the ability to leap from one body to another à la **THE HIDDEN**, Pinker seeks vengeance against football jock Jonathan Parker (a pre-CHICAGO HOPE Peter Berg), whose slaughtered family was the swan song of Pinker's homicidal career. After "dying" in the electric chair,



Mitch Pileggi is a bad guy who will spark your imagination in Wes Craven's SHOCKER.

Pinker returns—via electricity—to torment Jonathan for personal reasons which become clear during the chaotic finale, which finds both men leaping through a variety of television programs, including heavy metal videos and *LEAVE IT TO BEAVER*. Thrown into this paranormal stew is Jonathan's murdered girlfriend, Alison (Camille Cooper), who visits him in blood-soaked visions to warn him of Pinker's next move.

The boxoffice failure of **SHOCKER** was initially attributed to Sean Cunningham's strikingly similar production **THE HORROR SHOW**, directed by James Isaac and released the same year. Even without competition, Craven's film lacks spark, so to speak. A shame, really, as the opening half hour represents one of his most sustained achievements, a delirious and brutal first act which spins its protagonist through a series of jolting, genre-smashing plot twists, rivaled only by 1988's **JACK'S BACK**. Unfortunately, after Pinker's electrocution, it's business as usual with the film straining far too much to juggle

social satire, trendy one-liner horror, and forced plot revelations, while poor Berg and Pileggi deteriorate into one-dimensional cartoon characters. The head-banging heavy metal score which overtakes the film is also a major liability, making Dario Argento's similar musical excursions at the time sound subtle in comparison.

While the American DVD from Universal (20436DVD, \$19.90) offers only a slick anamorphic transfer (1.85:1) and theatrical trailer, the German DVD from Kinowelt offers a significant amount of bonus material, beginning with an audio commentary by Craven. As with his discussions on other discs, the director mixes scholarly analysis and production information quite well, explaining his satiric intentions with the storyline, his theories of presenting horror onscreen, and his feelings about the finished product and its wranglings with the MPAA. In many respects more entertaining and satisfying than the film itself, Craven's commentary should be enough to motivate

fans with PAL-compatible players to hand over a few extra dollars. The disc also contains a multi-angle storyboard gallery detailing Pinker's TV-hopping trek and an alternate German language track, with optional subtitles in English, German, or Turkish.

Also available from Kinowelt are Region 2 PAL editions of John Carpenter's **PRINCE OF DARKNESS** [as *Im Fürsten der Dunkelheit*, Kinowelt #500279, 97m 2s] and **THEY LIVE** [as *Sie Leben*, Kinowelt #500280, 89m 51s], which we previously reviewed as domestic Image Entertainment DVDs in VW 46:69, both now OOP. Both of these important titles in Carpenter's filmography have been dramatically upgraded from the Image releases, which were part of a package the company licensed from domestic distributor Universal Pictures. The Kinowelt discs boast sterling new 16:9 anamorphic transfers with 2.0 stereo surround soundtracks (in German and English), subtitles in nine different languages, trailers, and new audio commentaries by

Carpenter, who is joined by Peter Jason on **PRINCE** and Roddy Piper on **THEY LIVE**. The latter disc also includes an 8m "Making of" short that interviews actor Keith David, as well as Carpenter and Piper, and documents the filming of the longest screen fist-fight of the 20th Century.

The Kinowelt titles are in a peculiar conundrum, given the state of German law, because the films they have released—while only R rated here—are considered *verboten* in Germany and can neither be advertised or sold there over the Internet. Fortunately, Kinowelt has sublicensed their special editions to Momentum and these UK versions are easily obtained from British Internet outlets like www.blackstar.co.uk or www.bensonsworld.co.uk, where the average price is identical to those in the preceding paragraph. A select number of the titles, like the Carpenter discs, are also available domestically from



*Roddy Piper's magic glasses peel away the illusion from reality in John Carpenter's sci fi social satire **THEY LIVE**.*

Poker Industries (see Sources), which charges \$31.99 per title.

Lastly, Kinowelt has announced the release of a deluxe two-disc presentation of **THE HITCHER**. The first disc presents

the film in an anamorphic widescreen 2.35:1 transfer with a Dolby Digital 5.1 remix, accompanied by two audio commentaries—one by director Robert Harmon and screenwriter Eric Red, and a scene specific commentary by actors Rutger Hauer and C. Thomas Howell, director Robert Harmon, screenwriter Eric Red, producer Ed Feldman, director of photography John Seale and composer Mark Isham. The second disc includes "The Hitcher: How Do These Movies Get Made?" a brand new 40m documentary that includes on-camera interviews with the contributors to the second commentary; the 10m short film **THE ROOM**, which is Rutger Hauer's directorial debut, with commentary by Hauer; Robert Harmon's 32m directorial debut, **CHINA LAKE**, with audio commentary; script excerpts from **THE HITCHER**, including deleted scenes; extensive filmographies; plus teaser and theatrical release trailers. HBO Home Video's domestic single disc release, issued in 2000, looks anemic by comparison. 🐾

*John Carpenter's **PRINCE OF DARKNESS** is now available as an import DVD with more extras and a far superior 16:9 transfer.*



VIDEO TAPEVINE

It's a Way Out Teddy Bear Happenin'!

A NOTE ON TIMINGS

The timings listed for the following tapes reflect only the length of the film itself, and do not include such ephemera as video company logos, FBI warnings, supplementary trailers, or MPAA ratings certificates. The only exceptions to this rule are those films in which the soundtrack is first heard while the distributor's logo is still onscreen.

All of the VHS releases reviewed in this month's "Video Tapevine" are also available in the new and increasingly popular DVD-R format. In addition to the information provided in the following case-specific reviews, we feel it is important to point out to our readers that, while DVD-Rs produce much higher quality results than do VHS copies made from the same masters, DVD-Rs can be resistant to playback on some DVD players manufactured as recently as two or three years ago. For example, they spin up fine on our computer's DVD drive, but they won't load at all on our Panasonic DVL-909 DVD/LD player and they play on our Apex AD-600A DVD player intermittently at best—they lock up every few minutes and need to be jogged ahead with the FFWD key. That said, we're told that all DVD players of recent manufacture can play them—and since DVD-R is clearly going to take the place of VHS, we want to start covering them for you. But if you're uncertain of how your equipment will take to them, we recommend testing the waters with one DVD-R before buying a bunch. —TL

IT'S A HAUNTED HAPPENIN'!

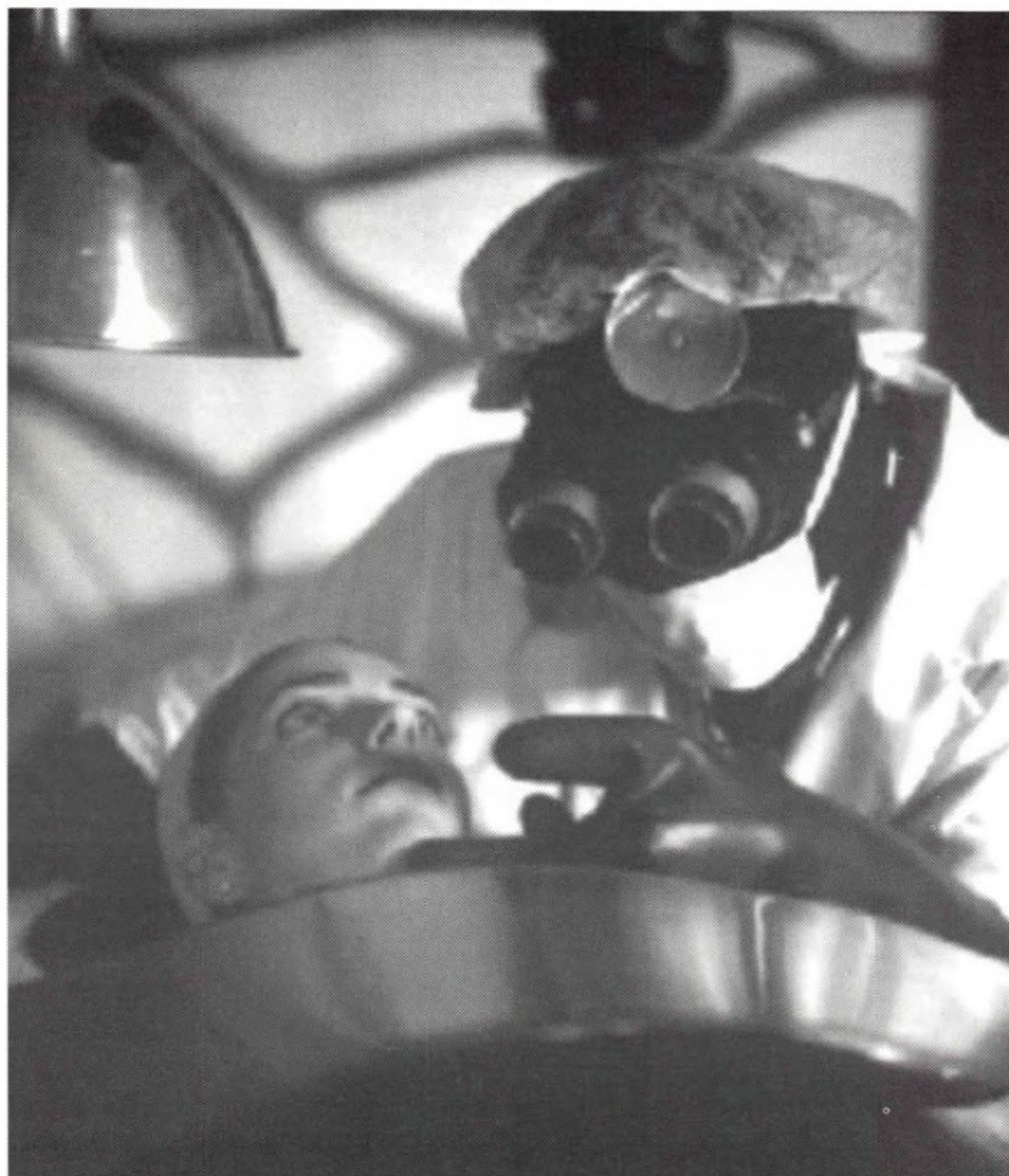
2003, Amusement Films,
HF/S/+, \$25.00 ppd., VHS
D/S/+, \$35.00 ppd., DVD-R,
89m 38s

By John Charles

The Soultanglers—a girl group out to "destroy the whole Brittany/Christina moppet and bring back The Ramones"—is invited to a Battle of the Bands contest being put on by the GHOUL-A-GO-GO TV show.

KEY

+	Supplements
16:9	WS TV Adaptable
CC	Closed Captioned
D	Digital
DD	Dolby Digital
DTS	Digital Theater Systems (Audio)
DVD-0	No Region Code
DVD-1	USA, Canada
DVD-2	Europe, Japan
HF	Hi-Fi
LB	Letterboxed
MA	Multiple Audio
NSR	No Suggested Retail
OOP	Out of Print
P&S	Pan&Scan
S	Stereo
SS	Surround Sound
ST	Subtitles



A mad scientist harvests enzymes from girl group musicians in a bid to rule the world of rock 'n roll in IT'S A HAUNTED HAPPENIN'!

However, in order to participate, tattooed tough girl Lydia (Ginette Marte, who has Angelina Jolie's lips and Fran Drescher's voice) and her bandmates must stay at isolated Whitewood Mansion with their arch enemies, cleancut quartet The Darlings, led by the disgustingly prim Emma (Karla Bruning). Groups who spent the night at Whitewood in the past have disappeared, victims of mad Dr. Valarious (co-writer Jon Sanborne, with a badly dubbed voice) and his henchthings Bobo the Gorilla and Gomar, the hunchback butler. It seems that, whenever North American females play rock and roll, a certain enzyme is created that the doctor has harvested from various

prisoners over the years. By combining and then siphoning the mixture extruded from Lydia and Emma, Valarious will have the serum he needs to overcome his one-hit-wonder past and conquer the world of rock 'n' roll.

Co-writer/director Pat Bishow's latest digital video extravaganza offers a little bit of everything: clips from **SAMSON IN THE WAX MUSEUM**, **DOCTOR OF DOOM**, **MONSTERS CRASH THE PAJAMA PARTY** (an obvious inspiration for the story here), and old toy commercials, bad miniatures, movie memorabilia, spy girls, mummies, references to The Bowery Boys and 1960s Scopitones, found footage, blatant commercial

plugs, a send-up of **POLTERGEIST**'s malevolent clown doll... you name it. These barely related ingredients are held together by a wonderfully eclectic assortment of songs by the likes of Lesley Gore, Petula Clarke, Richard Hell, Shonen Knife, Nick Lowe, The Banana Splits, The Carrie Nations, The Buzzcocks, The Clash, and Devo! Bishow (appearing as a bitter nostalgia store owner named Dr. Remember) also enjoys his most talented cast to date, with Marte, Bruning, and especially Jamie Andrews (channelling Lou Costello as the Soultanglers' clumsy, perpetually terrified guitarist) giving endearing, fully professional performances. On the downside, what little narrative there is moves at a crawl because of the filmmakers' desire to cram in so many in-jokes and "why not?" moments. With about 10m of this secondary material excised, the picture might lose a modicum of charm but would flow much better.

The video image usually looks good when it is supposed to and the stereo mix has sufficient energy and presence. Both the tape and DVD-R (18 chapters, SP mode) include a "Behind the Scenes" section (19m 37s) showing Bishow and his crew having preliminary discussions about what they want to do, staging rehearsals and auditions (Frances "Go Girl" Lee does read-throughs with the actresses), on-set footage (which includes some very amusing foul-ups, like a mummy whose pants are visible underneath his bandages), and a handful of deleted scenes. There are also trailers for Bishow's **THE ADVENTURES OF EL FRENETICO & GO GIRL** [reviewed VW 44:8] and **THE GIRLS FROM H.A.R.M.** [VW 64:15].



Jennifer Billingsley in the grip of *THE THIRSTY DEAD*.

THE THIRSTY DEAD

aka *THE BLOOD CULT OF SHANGRI-LA, BLOOD HUNT*
1974, *Something Weird Video*,
(HF/LB/+ VHS), (D/LB/+ DVD-R),
\$20.00 ppd., 87m 33s

By John Charles

Shot in The Philippines, this silly, PG-rated horror potboiler has neither vampires nor zombies but it does offer a canoe trip through a sewer, magical healing leaves and, needless to say, the thespian support of Vic Diaz. When several American girls living in Manila go missing, the local police (led by Diaz) suspect that a Hong Kong white slavery ring is behind the abductions. The real culprits are actually a cult that dwells in a (decidedly *papier maché*) jungle hideaway and lives according to the dictates of Raoum, a 500 year-old severed head in a red cube ("Raoum knows and Raoum will decide")! While most of the captives (including Judith McConnell

as a bubble-headed go-go dancer who is incredibly nonchalant about the whole thing) are destined to become unwilling blood donors to ensure the immortality of the cult members, stewardess Laura (**WHITE LIGHTNING**'s Jennifer Billingsley) is mistaken for the long-prophesied "Chosen One." Told that she must join the cult or share the fate of her friends, Laura refuses but co-ruler Baru (**DOCTOR DEATH, SEEKER OF SOULS**' John Considine) remains adamant. Those whose lifeforce is extracted gradually shrivel up into horrific old crones, a fate from which the lovestruck Baru decides to save Laura, even if it costs him his own immortality.

Aside from a few chuckles engendered by the pokey dialogue, stilted performances, and silly costumes, this is a mostly dull affair with noticeably lower production values than Eddie Romero and Gerry de Leon's films of the time. Richard LaSalle's

score works overtime trying to inject elements of mystery, adventure, and terror, but poor direction and neon bright lighting negate any opportunities for atmosphere. It also doesn't help that very little is adequately explained, though the fact that this all-Filipino cult is run by two Caucasians says everything one needs to know about film marketing. This apparently represents the only feature film credit for Terry Becker, who had previously helmed episodes of such primetime network series like *MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE* and *ROOM 222*. How he went from what appears to have been steady employment in Hollywood to making a no-budget horror picture in the Philippines would almost certainly make for a more interesting story than what ended up onscreen.

THE THIRSTY DEAD was released domestically by the long defunct International Amusement Corporation and has been

out on several video labels over the years. It was shot with a hard matte and, as far as we are aware, Something Weird's edition is the first ever to offer the film in widescreen (1.70:1). The source material features minor wear at the reel changes and a couple of small splices, but is very clean overall, and the presentation is quite satisfying. The audio is mildly noisy in spots but passable. The SP-mode DVD-R (which has 19 randomly placed chapters for the feature) also includes enjoyable trailers for **HORROR HIGH**, **THE BLOOD SPATTERED BRIDE**, **DON'T LOOK IN THE BASEMENT**, **THE PSYCHO LOVER** (narrated by Casey Kasem!), **THE DORM THAT DRIPPED BLOOD**, **SUD-DEN TERROR**, **MARY MARY BLOODY MARY**, **BLACK PIT OF DR. M**, and **BACK FROM THE DEAD** (narrated by Paul Frees).

SWV and Image will be issuing **THE THIRSTY DEAD** on DVD in October, presumably with an as-yet-undisclosed second feature and without the company bug.

UP YOUR TEDDY BEAR

aka **MOTHER, HOT MOTHER.**

THE TOY GRABBERS

1970, Something Weird Video, (HF/+ VHS), (D/+ DVD-R), \$20.00 ppd., 82m 50s

By Tim Lucas

There should be a word to describe the curious "freak show" appeal of seeing actors, familiar to us from wholesome forms of entertainment, turn up in more sordid and "adult-oriented" material. Such a case is this extremely odd film—written, produced and directed by Don Joslyn—which features **UNDER-DOG**'s Wally Cox and **BATMAN**'s Julie Newmar and Victor Buono

in a free-form Oedipal comedy about male sexual inadequacies. Cox stars as Clyde King, a tiny, child-like, single male with two defining interests: skirt-chasing and entertaining children with his handmade toys. Like a dog who runs after cars, Clyde doesn't know what to do with the skirts once he catches them, and therein lies his problem. Enter "Mother" (Newmar), the CEO of a major toy company, who sees potential in Clyde's humble finger puppets (which children love more than the pricey toys she manufactures) and determines to hire him at all costs. Her recruiting officer, 400-pound Lyle "Skippy" Ferns (Buono), has trouble snaring Clyde with promises of money and executive position, but soon determines what is nearest and dearest to his heart. Lyle proceeds to arrange for Clyde a series of "dates" with

Little Wally Cox gets an eyeful of Mother (Julie Newmar) in this childhood flashback from the Oedipal "comedy" UP YOUR TEDDY BEAR.



working girls—and, when all of these fail, he demonstrates his own loyalty to “Mother” by dressing up in drag and trying to seduce Clyde himself! But these physical opposites actually have much in common, because both Lyle and Clyde are dominated by “Mother” (Clyde’s real mother is also played by Newmar, seen in flashbacks), whom they love and loathe equally, until one extremity ultimately wins out over the other.

Basically a very tatty, half-baked burlesque, **UP YOUR TEDDY BEAR** is an unexceptional vehicle for Cox (who was in-between Disney dreck like **THE BOATNIKS** and **THE BAREFOOT EXECUTIVE**, and just a few years away from a fatal coronary at age 49) and it offers nothing more revealing of Newmar than a bikini view, but you may find it worth catching for the sheer spectacle of Victor Buono. Far more entertaining (and embarrassing) than his appearance in **THE MAD BUTCHER** (1971; reviewed VW 79:58), Buono not only dresses in drag (he looks like Mama Cass in a Kabuki performance of Ken Russell’s **WHORE**), but flounces around in a XXXXXL Little League outfit, percolates in a *schvitz* with a naked Angelique Pettyjohn, kicks a dog, tries to cram his mammoth heft into a compact car, and even attempts a (rather chaste) sexual assault on Newmar. The point of it all eluded me, but Buono and Cox are depicted as polar physical opposites, yet both equally crippled by maternal devotion, while the glacial Newmar’s position as the president of a toy company indicates that her maternal influence extends from coast-to-coast, if not around the entire world. Photographed by Robert Maxwell (**BLOOD MANIA**, **SWEET SWEETBACK**, **ASTRO-ZOMBIES**), the movie looks

cheap and only jolts to life visually in a few stylized flashbacks to Cox’s childhood (stylized in the sense that a LAUGH-IN skit is stylized), wherein Clyde’s Mother is seen discouraging her son’s nascent sexual curiosities. The movie is given its highest polish by a surprisingly up-market score by—of all people—Quincy Jones, already an accomplished film composer (**IN THE HEAT OF THE NIGHT**, **IN COLD BLOOD**) at the time and definitely slumming here; a glossy sampler of pop psychedelia, with a booming bass that sounds great coming from a subwoofer, it deserves rediscovery and a belated CD release.

UP YOUR TEDDY BEAR is presented in a fullscreen transfer that was likely matted to 1.66:1 for theatrical projection; Maxwell’s camera compositions—which appear to be 16mm blown up to 35mm—are not always framed well, but they don’t appear to be cropped either. The image quality is erratic—excellent in well-lit environments and exteriors, pasty and grainy in darker interiors—but acceptable, with good, only-slightly-faded color and no distracting levels of wear-and-tear. The audio quality of this SP-mode DVD-R, as mentioned before, is very good, marking a commendable improvement of SWV’s past track record with VHS releases, which were sometimes not even duplicated on Hi-Fi VHS decks. There are a decent number of chapter breaks, but they are not specified by menu, nor is there much rhyme or reason to their placement. The amusing liner notes are credited to “‘Handsome’ Harry Archer,” a reference to the male protagonist of **ATTACK OF THE FIFTY FOOT WOMAN** (1958), yet another victim of the Alpha-Female personality.

VIRGIN SACRIFICE

aka **FURY OF THE JUNGLE**
1959, *Something Weird Video*,
(HF/+ VHS), (D/+ DVD-R),
\$20.00 ppd., 63m 34s

By John Charles

Against his better judgment, great white spear hunter Samson (played by real-life adventurer David DaLie, also featured in **THE MIGHTY JUNGLE** and **SWAMP COUNTRY**) treks back into the jungles of Guatemala to capture several big game animals for an associate’s circus. Sometime before, he witnessed the local Vicuni tribe sacrificing a captured woman and, now, he runs across one of his old friends lying dead in the brush. A tiger (which is clearly a *leopard*, a species of cat not found in South America) ambushes Samson, but the burly hunter is able to put a stop to the beast with his hunting knife. Vicuni warrior Tumic (Antonio Gutierrez) is furious about the death of the “tiger” and warns Samson that he would normally pay with his life—but the tribe’s god accepts only virgin sacrifices, so the Vicuni proceed to kidnap the young daughter of a local (played by the picture’s director, Fernando Wagner), to serve as the offering. Samson sets out in pursuit but will have to rely on his brains as well as brawn, to prevent Tumic and the gods from having their way.

Reportedly shot on location, this threadbare programmer does not offer much in the way of excitement, save for that aforementioned bit of leopard, er, “tiger” wrestling. Any thrills in this scene, however, quickly evaporate when one notices that DaLie’s stunt double doesn’t even bother to double the actor’s mustache and beard! Although there is plenty of hiking through the jungle and



Fans of old "Spicy Western" pulps will find some scenes to enjoy in Something Weird's VIRGIN SACRIFICE.

cut-rate thrills involving snakes and Vicuni ambushes, the thin scenario still has to be padded out to "supporting feature" length with some Latin dance numbers at the local watering hole. The project's real claim to fame is an ingredient rarely found in the genre at this time: nudity. The opening reel's sacrificial victim (Linda Cordova) has her top torn off, a bit evidently shot mainly for overseas markets, as there were not many venues in America at the time where this could have been shown (the film also circulated in an alternate, general release version called **FURY OF THE JUNGLE**).

SWV's 35mm source print is quite clean but some shrinkage has apparently occurred,

resulting in gatefloat during the opening credits. The fullscreen image is a little soft, though the "Blazing Tropicolor" hues are still reasonably blazing. There is not much range in the (entirely post-synced) audio, but dialogue is coherent. Sweetening the deal considerably is a large collection of trailers following the feature. In addition to one for this film (faded but matted), there are entertaining spots for **ESCAPE FROM HELL ISLAND**, Barry Mahon's **THE DEAD ONE**, **ATTACK OF THE GIANT LEECHES**, **MACUMBA LOVE**, **WOMEN OF THE WORLD**, **THE MATING URGE**, **HONEYMOON OF HORROR**, **ISLE OF SIN**, Edgar G. Ulmer's **THE CAVERN**, **VOODOO VILLAGE**, **ONE**

MILLION AC/DC, a combo trailer for **SPREE** and **ADAM AND EVE** (the former narrated by Paul Frees), **GEISHA PLAYMATES**, and **ECCO** (Frees again). The SP mode DVD-R includes 16 randomly placed chapters for the movie.

WAY OUT

1966, *Something Weird Video*, (HF/+ VHS), (D/+ DVD-R), \$20.00 ppd., 102m 2s

By John Charles

Irvin S. Yeaworth, Jr. earned himself a place in genre history by helming the Jack H. Harris hits, **THE BLOB** (1958; reviewed VW 72:24), **THE 4-D MAN** (1959; VW 63:38), and **DINOSAURUS!** (1960; VW 68:51). However, as



*BLOB director Irvin S. Yeaworth, Jr. delves into Lou Reed territory with the cautionary smack saga, **WAY OUT**.*

Frank Henenlotter points out in his liner notes for this release, Yeaworth (an ordained Methodist minister) began his career making religious features and returned to them after his tenure with Harris. His '50s short, **TWICE CONVICTED** (later expanded by other hands and released in 1956 as the feature **THE FLAMING TEEN AGE**) dealt with the life of a drug addict, and the director explored that territory again a decade later with **WAY OUT**, charting the day-to-day world of Puerto Rican junkies living a razor's edge existence in the Bronx.

Frankie (Franklin Rodriguez) endures a depressing routine in a tiny apartment with his father, an abusive and alcoholic prison guard. The teen escapes this dismal reality by dealing heroin and using his own product. One morning, he meets Jim (James Dunleavy), a similarly disenfranchised youth, and enlists his aid in getting revenge on a local jewelry store owner via a smash-and-grab

robbery of his establishment. Jim is soon running smack with Frankie and his brain-blown cohorts, Che Che (Cecil White) and Louis (Louis Colon), who operate out of a local basement. Their fortunes soon turn sour, thanks to arrests and a citywide shortage of junk. Frankie, in particular, finds his back against the wall, and the unyielding love that a girl (Sharyn Jimenez) in Frankie's building has for Jim may compel her to take up the habit.

Based on the play **THE ADDICTS** by John Gimenez (who also plays Frankie's father), **WAY OUT** is surprisingly poignant at times, thanks to the use of genuine, reformed addicts (who provide testimonials in the final minutes) for the lead characters. There is nothing subtle about the storyline, the presentation, or the plainly obvious message about God being the answer to all that ails you; the dialogue and staging occasionally vault well over the line into Dwain Esper territory. The small budget

also meant that much of the dialogue (particularly during exteriors) had to be looped. Regardless, most of the performances remain genuinely admirable. The deliveries may not always be polished, but the lack of self-consciousness and the actors' heartfelt portrayal of withdrawal, desperation, and pathological behavior help the film over most of its rough spots. In addition to the obvious physical dangers, the characters' monotonously single-minded quest for a fix is also presented quite effectively; as Frankie says, "You boost, you cop, you shoot, that's all there is." **WAY OUT** is also quite stark in its depiction of heroin usage, offering detailed looks at its preparation and injection (with the sometimes botched and bloody results also demonstrated). The picture should find favor with exploitation fans and those nostalgic for old New York, with the many street sequences (presumably shot without permits) a valuable time capsule.

Mild scratches and wear are apparent on occasion but the 35mm source is usually quite clean. Gatefloat is evident in spots and colors are greenish at times; the sound is in keeping with the original mix. A brief bit of digital break-up occurs at 22:50. Considering that the film appears to have all but vanished shortly after its original release, this is a very welcome recovery and the presentational flaws are no more than a minor drawback. Trailers for two other features about drug addicts, **THE NARCOTICS STORY** and **MONKEY ON MY BACK** (the latter a United Artists release starring Cameron Mitchell) round out the disc (SP mode, 25 chapters).

YOU'VE GOT TO BE SMART

1967, *Something Weird Video*, (HF/+ VHS), (D/+ DVD-R), \$20.00 ppd., 91m 55s

By John Charles

Something Weird Video may be known for their selection of vintage sleaze, but they also carry a few family films. This late '60s obscurity would seem to offer the best of both worlds for their customers: an all-ages picture starring Mamie Van Doren! In truth, it's hard to imagine this sincere but utterly tin-eared musical having much appeal for anyone but bad movie fanatics and curiosity seekers. Slick L.A. ad man Nick Sloane (**ANGELS FROM HELL**'s Tom Stern) gets caught trying to heist one of his company's accounts. He not only finds himself out of a job but his well-connected boss arranges for Nick to be barred from every other advertising firm in the city. After accidentally exiting off of the interstate, Nick finds himself in Platitude, Arkansas (pop. 238), home of 7 year-old singing preacher Methuselah Jones (Jeff Bantam) and his two cousins (Mike and Fritz Bantam). Seeing the boy's obvious exploitation value, Nick convinces Methuselah that his help is needed back in L.A. to cleanse the metropolis of its rampant sin. Mild-mannered GBC TV producer Jerry Harper (**COUNT YORGA, VAMPIRE**'s Roger Perry) decides to give the kid a try, but is unhappy with Sloane's obvious motives and the fact that his girlfriend (**TEENAGE MONSTER**'s Gloria Castillo) is working for the con man. TV TABERNACLE is a nationwide smash but, rather than sign a lucrative advertising deal with Amalgamated Steel, Jerry allows the show to run on viewer



Those ballad-beltin' Bantam boys get their shot at working with Mamie Van Doren in the lamentable kiddie musical YOU'VE GOT TO BE SMART.

contributions, just like a real church.

Writer/director Ellis Kadison (co-writer of Samuel Gallu's **THE-ATRE OF DEATH** and Disney's **THE GNOME MOBILE**) has structured the movie in the time-honored musical template but he has a major problem: his cast has little discernible talent for song! This particularly applies to Jeff Bantam, one of the least appealing child actors in memory. Methuselah is supposed to be angelic, charismatic and wise beyond his years but, with his epidemic freckles, stern demeanor, and nasal voice, Bantam comes off like a slow-witted grade school bully. Perry and Castillo's singing is somewhat better, but the numbers are no more appealing, and the staging is usually so ill-conceived, one becomes distracted marvelling at the awkwardness of it all. The numbers themselves range from forgettable to downright wretched; the best that can be said of them is that they are usually short. Fans are warned that

"Special Guest Star" Van Doren does not make an appearance until the 56m mark and is given little of interest to do. Preston Foster (**DOCTOR X**) and George "Shug" Fisher (**THE GIANT GILA MONSTER**) also appear.

Slight gatefloat is evident throughout and the element displays some vertical scratches and speckles. The image is generally clear but the colors are starting to turn and a light green pulse can be seen throughout most of the running time. The audio track has some surface noise, and no upper end, but is usually bearable. Parents should note that, in contrast to Something Weird's **THE WONDERFUL LAND OF OZ/JACK AND THE BEANSTALK** DVD, this DVD-R is *not* family friendly. The film is G-level but the presentation begins with the usual gleefully sleazy SWV intro and the movie is followed by trailers for the Mamie Van Doren vehicle **PARTY GIRLS FOR THE CANDIDATE** (narrated by Gary Owens), Larry Buchanan's **THE OTHER SIDE OF BONNIE &**

CLYDE, and Jerry Gross' **TEEN-AGE MOTHER**, with the messy conclusion of the latter's birth reel included. The SP mode DVD-R offers 20 random chapters for the feature.

THE ZODIAC KILLER

aka **THE ZODIAK KILLER**

1971, *Something Weird Video*,
(HF/+ VHS), (D/+ DVD-R),
\$20.00 ppd., 86m 15s

By John Charles

There are plenty of movies about real life serial killers but here is one made while the antagonist was still on the loose! **THE ZODIAC KILLER** is based on the like-named psychopath who may have committed as many as 17 murders from 1966-69 and, as it turns out, was never apprehended. The film begins as a mystery, offering two possible suspects. Jerry the mailman (Hal Reed), though hardly the pinnacle of politeness himself, is annoyed by all the rude people he has to deal with in life and prefers the company of his pet rabbits. Truck driver Grover (Bob Jones, who constantly fluffs his lines) is a gun-toting, middle-aged misogynist/would-be swinger, who abuses drugs, alcohol, and good taste with hideous suits and a bushy toupée that one imagines Howard Cosell would have left on the rack. Which one is responsible for the series of shootings and stabbings plaguing San Francisco? Any viewers who have spent time at the bottom of the exploitation barrel will be about eight steps ahead of the detectives here, Sgt. Tom Pittman (Ray Lynch) and Officer Ken Heller (played by... Tom Pittman).

Peopled almost exclusively by hilariously shrill characters who do nothing but complain and insult one another, the film reportedly recreates some of the



Still at liberty when the movie was released, The Zodiac Killer himself could have gone to see THE ZODIAC KILLER.

murders accurately, yet it fails utterly as an examination of the man behind the crimes. The script makes intermittent reaches for sick humor, but producer/director Tom Hanson (who also has a supporting role as one of the victims) stages everything so poorly that even these bits fall flat. Aside from chuckles generated by the amateurish performances and hokey dialogue, the most striking thing about the movie, from today's perspective, is its casual but rampant misogyny. Virtually every male here makes a derogatory remark about women at some point; even former kiddie show host Doodles Weaver gets into the act ("I like 'em plump, juicy, and dumb!") during his opening reel cameo.

Academy Home Entertainment released this on tape in 1986 as **THE ZODIAK KILLER** (were they afraid that Zodiac would come out of hiding and sue for defamation of character?) but we are unable to compare it to *Something Weird's* version. This is an incredibly cheap feature, so the transfer is at the

mercy of the original production. Luckily, the 35mm source print is in very good condition and the image usually boasts reasonable color and detail levels. The sound has no problems that were not there already and is clear enough that you can actually hear the director yell "Cut!" during a beach sequence. Extras consist of the same trailers featured on the company's DVD-R for **THE THIRSTY DEAD** (though presented in a different order here), plus a great spot for Harold Daniels' **DATE WITH DEATH** (1959), which features a demonstration of the movie's subliminal "Psychorama" process. SWV and Image Entertainment will also be releasing **THE ZODIAC KILLER** in October on DVD with Lee Frost's **ZERO IN AND SCREAM** (1970; reviewed VW 17:16) and Barry Mahon's **THE SEX KILLER** (1967). While **ZODIAC** is only of passing interest on its own, it may play better as part of this thematically connected triple bill. The DVD-R is SP mode and includes 19 randomly encoded chapters. 



The Film Bulletin Reviews, 1969-1974

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BLOOD DEMON

Fairly interesting horror import, dubbed and cut to fit lowercase dualler slots. No Rating.

This German-made horror film is being packaged by Hemisphere Pictures as a co-feature to its **MAD DOCTOR OF BLOOD ISLAND**, which it far surpasses. Nominally based on Edgar Allan Poe's "The Pit and the Pendulum," it only brings the device in as a suspense gimmick near the end. No production credits are given other than that of prolific director Harald Reinl (and misspelled at that), who is best known for his work on the Edgar Wallace series and for his remake of Lang's *Die Nibelungen*. Manfred R. Kohlen's uncredited screenplay accents the morality play aspects of this genre, but obvious cuts totaling 13 minutes render the plot disjointed and vague, and references to "amnesia" and "the inheritance" irritatingly incomprehensible. The imaginative lighting and atmospherics of the first half give way to staginess in the latter portion, but the result is still above average despite the occasional risible quality of the dialogue, a fault common to most dubbed horror imports.

Christopher Lee, whose once-promising career is becoming the most mismanaged since that of the late Bela Lugosi, plays Count Regula, who is drawn and quartered (in apparently 16th century Germany) for murdering twelve virgins, and places a curse on the authorities responsible for his death. 35 years later, lawyer Lex

Barker and heiress Karin Dor are summoned to Lee's castle, unaware they are descendants of his executioners. The wild coach ride through an expressionistic forest of twisted trees with human appendages protruding, corpses hanging from the limbs *et al*, is the film's high spot. If not exactly up to the classic German silents, the sequence does have an effectively nightmarish and imaginative quality all its own. At the castle, Lee's body magically reassembles itself and he announces that he requires the blood of Miss Dor to gain eternal life. Barker is placed at the mercy of a not-very-convincing swinging pendulum. Barker outwits the machinery and confronts Lee with a crucifix, just as his allotted time on earth runs out. Lee disintegrates and the castle crumbles to ruins, leaving Barker and Miss Dor alone in the now-green forest.

1970 [1967]. *Die Schlangengrube und das Pendel*. Hemisphere Pictures. Eastman Color. 72 minutes. Christopher Lee, Lex Barker, Karin Dor. A Constantin-Film Production. Directed by Harald Reinl.

The history of **BLOOD DEMON** on video... got a few hours? Hemisphere's shortened version of the picture turned up on VHS as **CASTLE OF THE WALKING DEAD** (Interglobal Video), though it was 20m shorter than the original, rather than 15. Magnum's memorably titled **THE TORTURE CHAMBER OF DR. SADISM**—utilizing a retitled drive-in reissue print with a crudely inserted, hand-illustrated title card accompanied by a heavy hum—was the longest English version to surface, but even it may be missing incidental material from the original German cut. Something Weird Video currently offers **BLOOD DEMON** on VHS, but we're not sure which version they sell, as they designate it as **BLOOD DEMON/THE TORTURE CHAMBER OF DR. SADISM**! Anyway, definitely a title worthy of proper DVD release. Full-length version, please.

THE BLOOD ON SATAN'S CLAW

Extremely well-made horror film about Satan at work in 17th century English village may be too studied for the usual horror crowd, but with ballyhoo should do OK on duallers. Rated R.

Apart from the dedicated cultists, horror fans are, by and large, an indiscriminating lot by whom the crafted atmospherics and touches of excellence to be found in **THE BLOOD ON SATAN'S CLAW** may, unfortunately, go unappreciated. In fact, though, this modest British import ranks with the more considerable horror items of the past few years, and is certainly leagues ahead of anything Hammer has done for quite some time. The Cannon release, formerly **THE DEVIL'S TOUCH**, has been outfitted with some lurid ads in keeping with its new title, and has enough horrific sensationalism to get by on duallers in combination with the lesser **BEAST IN THE CELLAR**. In sum, though, the double bill is pitched on a more sophisticated level than its audience might desire.

CLAW presents a variation on the situation offered in **THE CONQUEROR WORM** of a few

seasons back, that of witchfinders out to cleanse a community of supernatural corruption. When portions of no less a personage than the Devil himself are unearthed by a farm boy plowing a field, dark powers are unleashed in the surrounding countryside, circa 1640. The Devil, a furry, black-shrouded mass of God-knows-what, regenerates himself by growing hairy pieces of Beelzebub on the bodies of local youngsters, which are then removed ritualistically and assimilated into the Master. Leading the young disciples is sexy Linda Hayden (**BABY LOVE**), whose sudden conversion to diabolism is never adequately explained. The late Patrick Wymark is ideal as an authoritarian character simply called The Judge, who mobilizes the forces of good, or at least of humanity, against the menace. The direction by Piers Haggard, H. Rider's grandson, is consistently intelligent, even when the story isn't, and handles the various murders, rapes and ravings extremely effectively—at least up to the rather muddled slow-motion climax which, for all its effort, just doesn't come off. A particular strength is an uncommonly authentic (to American eyes, at least) evocation of the period, enhanced by convincing settings and Dick Bush's stylish camerawork. Good

Depilatories can't save you from Satan in THE BLOOD ON SATAN'S CLAW.





If you're going to visit THE MAD DOCTOR OF BLOOD ISLAND, be sure to wear some flowers in your hair.

supporting work by Michele Dotrice, Barry Andrews, Wendy Padbury, Anthony Ainley and others also helps carry off what emerges in retrospect as a rather aimless screenplay by Robert Wynne-Simmons. The music score by Marc Wilkinson is really excellent, and a major element in the film's dramatic mood. There is some nudity, but cuts seem evident in a rape scene, and though the listed running time is 101 minutes, the print viewed ran only 94.

Cannon Releasing (Tigon British-Chilton Productions). Eastman color. 94 minutes. Patrick Wymark, Linda Hayden. Produced by Peter Andrews and Malcolm Heyworth. Directed by Piers Haggard.

Joe's closing remarks on the expurgated nature of Cannon's US prints should be held accountable for his comments on the vague or unexplained aspects of this film. Another movie with a convoluted video history that warrants resurrection on DVD, **THE BLOOD ON SATAN'S CLAW** was first released on the Paragon Video label, which issued the film minus at least two important scenes. (See *THE VIDEO WATCHDOG BOOK*, p. 57.) Next came a 1989 release from Cannon Video that was complete but derived from a faded print source. The 1993 re-release from MGM/UA looked better but reverted back to the incomplete version. There was also a Canadian edition issued by CIC Video in 1987. Clearly another title in need of DVD restoration and, as they are the current owners of the Cannon library, the ball would seem to be in MGM's court.

MAD DOCTOR OF BLOOD ISLAND

Cheap, sadistic horror film has blatant sex and violence angles for indiscriminating situations. Not for kiddies. No Rating.

Carrying on the dubious tradition begun by **BLOOD FEAST**, this is an unexpectedly repellant sex/sadism item made in the Philippines and distributed here by Hemisphere Pictures, which has taken to billing itself as "The House of Horror." Though officially unrated, the Kane W. Lynn-Eddie Romero production's rampant nudity, sexual interludes (including some breast-kissing and offscreen genital manipulation), and graphic gore (the usual animal entrails scattered around to simulate human viscera) undoubtedly would place it in the X category. Exhibitors should note that this is definitely not a Saturday matinee booking.

For all its sex and grue, **MAD DOCTOR OF BLOOD ISLAND** is mostly composed of dull dialogue interludes between the carnage, and though heavy ballyhoo may draw drive-in patrons, there is apt to be some horn-honking at various points. Production and direction are primitive, at best, with repeated use of rapid zooms whenever the

monster shows up. In its pitiful attempts to shock, the film includes an actual sequence of harrowing animal slaughter during a supposed "native sacrifice," which will revolt audiences of any type. In Reuben Canoy's sub-literate screenplay, the natives of Blood Island are turning mysteriously green. Local doctor Ronald Remy diagnoses chlorophyll poisoning: "When he comes to, give him some hot chicken soup—and no green vegetables, of course!" Meanwhile, a repulsive green mutant is loose on the island, tearing luckless residents limb from limb—and quite convincingly, for the most part. The natives attribute the killings to an angry god, but it is eventually revealed, after gouts of blood have been spilled, that the monster is the supposedly dead lover of island dancer Alicia Alonzo, who, we are told, has "become a whore for love." A trip to mad doctor Remy's *papier maché*-lined caverns reveals he caused all the horror with his unsuccessful chlorophyll-based leukemia cure, side-effects from which produced the monster. The green natives are victims of his ignoble experiments. At long last, the monster kills Remy and dies in the obligatory fire. But an infected native has escaped, stowing away on the boat to the mainland—suggesting the dread possibility of a sequel.

1970. Hemisphere Pictures. Eastman Color. 89 minutes. John Ashley Angelique Pettijohn. Produced by Eddie Romero. Directed by Gerry DeLeon and Eddie Romero.

"Sequel," indeed! See Shane M. Dallmann's feature on Image Entertainment's "The Blood Collection" for all the gory details.

NIGHT of BLOODY HORROR

Gruesome blood-psycho chiller should find market to indiscriminating ballyhoo spots. Rated R.

A buxom lass enters the plywood church confessional, asking forgiveness for having slept around. "Flesh will always be flesh, my child," intones the hooded priest, who adds "Vengeance is mine, sayeth the Lord" as he stabs her in the eye with a foot-long metal rod. Thus begins **NIGHT OF BLOODY HORROR**, another in the blood-psycho-goes-berserk vein, this time from Joy N. Houck, Jr.'s Howco International. On the basis of its lurid title and ad campaign alone, it should succeed as a drive-in and indiscriminating action house attraction. That's all the bloody horror there is for awhile, until another girl gets an axe in her chest and the family psychiatrist has his hand chopped off and his head split with a meat

cleaver. These are the high points, and jaded enthusiasts will find little else to get emotional about. Houck's direction of the film shows signs of imagination, though such touches as cutting from pools of blood to a bowl of tomato soup count for little in the face of frequently out-of-focus photography, amateur night theatrics, and inept grade-C production values.

Filmed in bilious color and "Violent Vision," Houck and Robert A. Weaver's script is a silly variation on **PSYCHO**, centering on ex-mental patient Gerald McRaney, described in an onscreen medical report as a "possible maniac-depressive," and tortured by the memory of accidentally shooting his younger brother as a child. When one of his spells comes over him—signified by a superimposed spiral—he fears he is the maniac responsible for the gory deaths of his girlfriends. Who would suspect it was really his dear old silvery-mouthed mother, about whom he has Oedipal sex dreams, and who carries on two-way conversations with the preserved corpses of her husband and son? She is finally shot by some unsympathetic policemen, and dies gurgling to her dead spouse, "I did it for you..."

1969. Howco-International. (A Cinema IV Production.) Color. 90 minutes. Gerald McRaney. Gaye Yellen, Evelyn Hendricks. Produced and directed by Joy N. Houck, Jr.

NIGHT OF BLOODY HORROR was released on VHS, before some of you were born, by Paragon Video. Shot in 16mm and blown-up to indistinct 35mm, it looked better on video than it did on theater screens—but not much better. Though undeserving of sustained attention, this movie remained active on the drive-in circuit through the mid-1970s and then resurfaced one last time, circa 1981, when Gerald McRaney landed the lead in the CBS series **SIMON & SIMON**.

TWITCH OF THE DEATH NERVE

Gory horror film is getting a hefty promo push via a "Face to Face Warning" gimmick whereby patrons must be personally cautioned about "scenes that may cause physiological shock." Should be good grosser for quick play-off in ballyhoo and horror markets as well as drive-ins. Rated R.

TWITCH OF THE DEATH NERVE, which has played some areas under the apt title of **CARNAGE**, is another strongly-sold ballyhoo slaughterfest from Hallmark Releasing Corp., the people who gave you **MARK OF THE DEVIL**. A big improvement over the latter, this Italian import (originally titled **ECOLOGY OF A CRIME**) also features enough violence and grue to satisfy the most rabid mayhem fans and benefits from the



Claudio Volonté's billhook is no match for being on the wrong side of a harpoon in Mario Bava's TWITCH OF THE DEATH NERVE.

inimitably stylish direction of horror specialist Mario Bava (**BLACK SUNDAY**). Assembled with a striking visual assurance that never ceases to amuse, this is typical Bava material—simply one ghastly murder after another, 13 in all, surrounded by what must be one of the most preposterous and confusing plots ever put on film. Just trying to sort out who did what to whom will keep the audience occupied throughout. The various demises are graphically staged with the usual Bava elan (though some have been snipped to avoid an X) as well as authentic perversity. Death is equated with beauty, and the most horrid fatalities, lovingly photographed by Bava himself, are garishly attractive.

Everybody, it seems, wants Countess Federica's estate—some to build a resort on the bay, others to save it for nature. The dear lady herself is hung with a noose in her own wheelchair. The verdict is suicide, but the culprit was her husband. Only he, too, was brutally knifed to death on the spot by an assailant. Four obnoxious teenagers break into the estate for a party. Swimming nude, buxom Brunhilde finds the Count decomposing in the bay and gets her throat slit. Her boyfriend gets an axe in the face and the other

couple, in a novel bit, are both skewered by the same spear while making love. A resident insect fancier is strangled with a telephone cord. His wife, a medium who astutely predicted doom, gets her head chopped off—both deeds done by the Countess' grasping daughter and her unpleasant husband. The Countess' illegitimate son, a squid fisherman, strangles the girlfriend of the architect who had the old lady killed, then gets speared to the wall. The architect gets his, too. Who could be left? It's the daughter and her husband, who dump all the bodies in the bay. So much for ecology. Looks like they're going to get away with it until—in one of the great wrap-ups of all time—their two angelic little children shotgun them both.

1971. *Ecologia del delitto*. Hallmark Releasing Corp. (Nuova Linea Cinematographica). Eastman Color. 84 minutes. Claudine Auger, Claudio Volonto, Luigi Pistilli, Laura Betti. Isa Miranda. Produced by Giuseppe Zacariello. Directed by Mario Bava.

The original export title for this movie was actually **BAY OF BLOOD** (hence its inclusion in this special "All Blood" installment), which was also its title when issued on tape in the mid-1980s by Gorgon Video. It is currently available, as **TWITCH OF THE DEATH NERVE** (but with the onscreen title of **BAY OF BLOOD**), on VHS and DVD from Image Entertainment as part of their "Mario Bava Collection."





BLOOD CHILLER REVIEW-O-RAMA!

Experiments with
HUMAN VICTIMS
create a
Hideous Monster

ALL-NEW:

Science meets Horror
as a Man-Made Creature
comes to Life!

Shane M. Dallmann Reviews
**"THE BLOOD
COLLECTION"**



IT'S A SAFE BET that any horror fan beyond his or her teenage years has been exposed, at one point or another, to the genre output of Hemisphere Pictures.

It was impossible to frequent the grindhouses and drive-ins of the late 1960s and early '70s without being exposed to Hemisphere's lurid artwork, bizarre gimmicks and hyperbole-packed, hysterically narrated trailers, promising shock after ghastly shock, horror beyond imagination, and—above all—blood, blood and more blood. Blood also dripped from the title of almost every film, and plenty of blood (of the red and green varieties) was visible onscreen. The films themselves, though usually greeted with critical disdain, certainly lived up to their billing, keeping patrons happy—and returning.

Hemisphere's bloody lineup included two highly unusual vampire films directed in the Philippines by Gerardo de Leon; two pickups toplining bankable marquee name Christopher Lee (**BLOOD DEMON** [reviewed on p. 21 of this issue] is probably best-known to fans as **TORTURE CHAMBER OF DR. SADISM**, while **BLOOD FIEND** is more familiar under its original title **THEATRE OF DEATH** [reviewed VW 80:66]; the crown jewels that fans now acknowledge as the "Blood Island Trilogy" (1959's **TERROR IS A MAN**, a precursor of sorts, was occasionally trotted back out to join the series as **BLOOD CREATURE**); and even a rogue American production specifically designed to masquerade as a Filipino film.

While the package continued to play some drive-ins as late as the early 1980s, its second major impact occurred in the mid-1970s with its arrival on syndicated television. A new generation of young creature-feature viewers, accustomed to the basically non-threatening environment of the Universal, AIP and Hammer classics that came to them every weekend, found significantly harsher material added to the mix, much to their surprise... and often to the consternation of their parents ("What on *earth* are you *watching*?"). While Hemisphere was by no means the only company upping the ante, it could be argued that they were the most consistently potent—particularly as some unsuspecting TV stations, accustomed as they were to the horror films they had previously aired, saw no need to check these new arrivals for censorable content and let them run uncut in their earliest airings. The new viewers experienced none of the showmanship that lured paying customers in the first place, and had no chance to recognize the films as ones they might have been forbidden to see earlier on the big screen (squeamish

THE BLOOD DRINKERS

Kulay Dugo Ang Gabi

aka **THE VAMPIRE PEOPLE**

1966, Image Entertainment, DD-2.0/MA/+,
\$19.99, 85m 58s, DVD-1

BRIDES OF BLOOD

aka **ISLAND OF LIVING HORROR**,
GRAVE DESIRES, **BRIDES OF THE BEAST**

1968, Image Entertainment, DD-2.0/MA/+,
\$19.99, 96m 9s, DVD-1

MAD DOCTOR OF BLOOD ISLAND

aka **TOMB OF THE LIVING DEAD**,
SCREAMS OF THE UNDEAD

1969, Image Entertainment, DD-2.0/MA/+,
\$19.99, 89m, DVD-1

BEAST OF BLOOD

aka **BEAST OF THE DEAD**

1970, Image Entertainment, DD-2.0/MA/+,
\$19.99, 90m 3s, DVD-1

BRAIN OF BLOOD

aka **THE CREATURE'S REVENGE**,
THE BRAIN, **BRAIN DAMAGE**

1971, Image Entertainment, DD-2.0/MA/+,
\$19.99, 85m 33s, DVD-1

BLOOD OF THE VAMPIRES

CURSE OF THE VAMPIRES,
CREATURES OF EVIL

1970, Image Entertainment, DD-2.0/MA/+,
\$19.99, 81m 41s, DVD-1

HORROR OF THE BLOOD MONSTERS

aka **VAMPIRE MEN OF THE LOST PLANET**,
SPACE MISSION TO THE LOST PLANET

1970, Image Entertainment, DD-2.0/MA/+,
\$19.99, 84m 54s, DVD-1

programmers were more troubled by the word "blood" than by blood itself, necessitating a near-complete series of title substitutions). So, with no warning at all, many a young fan found himself obliged to rethink just what constituted a "monster movie."

Variant editions of various and sundry Hemisphere horror product have existed on tape since the dawn of home video: often retitled, sometimes recut, frequently of dubious quality, and almost never identified in context as parts of a larger package. But the opportunity for fresh definitive discovery has come at last: Image Entertainment has released six of Hemisphere's horror titles on Region 1 DVD under the banner of "The Blood Collection." The films themselves are presented in all their uncut glory; much of the original hype and hoopla (and some additional surprises) has been collected in the supplemental material; and best of all, the entire history of not only the movies, but of Hemisphere Pictures itself has been provided—partially in the form of interviews with surviving cast and crew members but, most significantly, in the form of a six-part audio commentary provided by producer/distributor Samuel M. Sherman (the former editor of the Warren Publication SCREEN CLASSICS ILLUSTRATED) which adds up to *over five hours* worth of information.

In the years leading up to his formation of Independent-International Pictures with his long-time friend and partner Al Adamson, Sherman worked for Hemisphere, which consisted primarily of producers Irwin Pizor and Kane W. Lynn, and director Eddie Romero. During the mid-1960s, Hemisphere specialized in releasing such B&W WWII films as **THE RAVAGERS** and **THE WALLS OF HELL** [reviewed VW 82:16], produced in the Philippines, with Romero occasionally serving as co-director with frequent collaborator Gerardo de Leon. These efforts, however, met with little or no Stateside box office success. It was Sherman who suggested that the company turn its attention to the potentially lucrative horror market—and he was particularly impressed with Gerry de Leon's first (partial) color film, **THE BLOOD DRINKERS**.



*The jealous Tanya (Eva Montes) prepares to deal with the other undead woman in her beloved's life... er, death in **THE BLOOD DRINKERS**.*

SHARP FANGS STRIKE on the VAMPIRE'S NIGHTS of BLOOD!

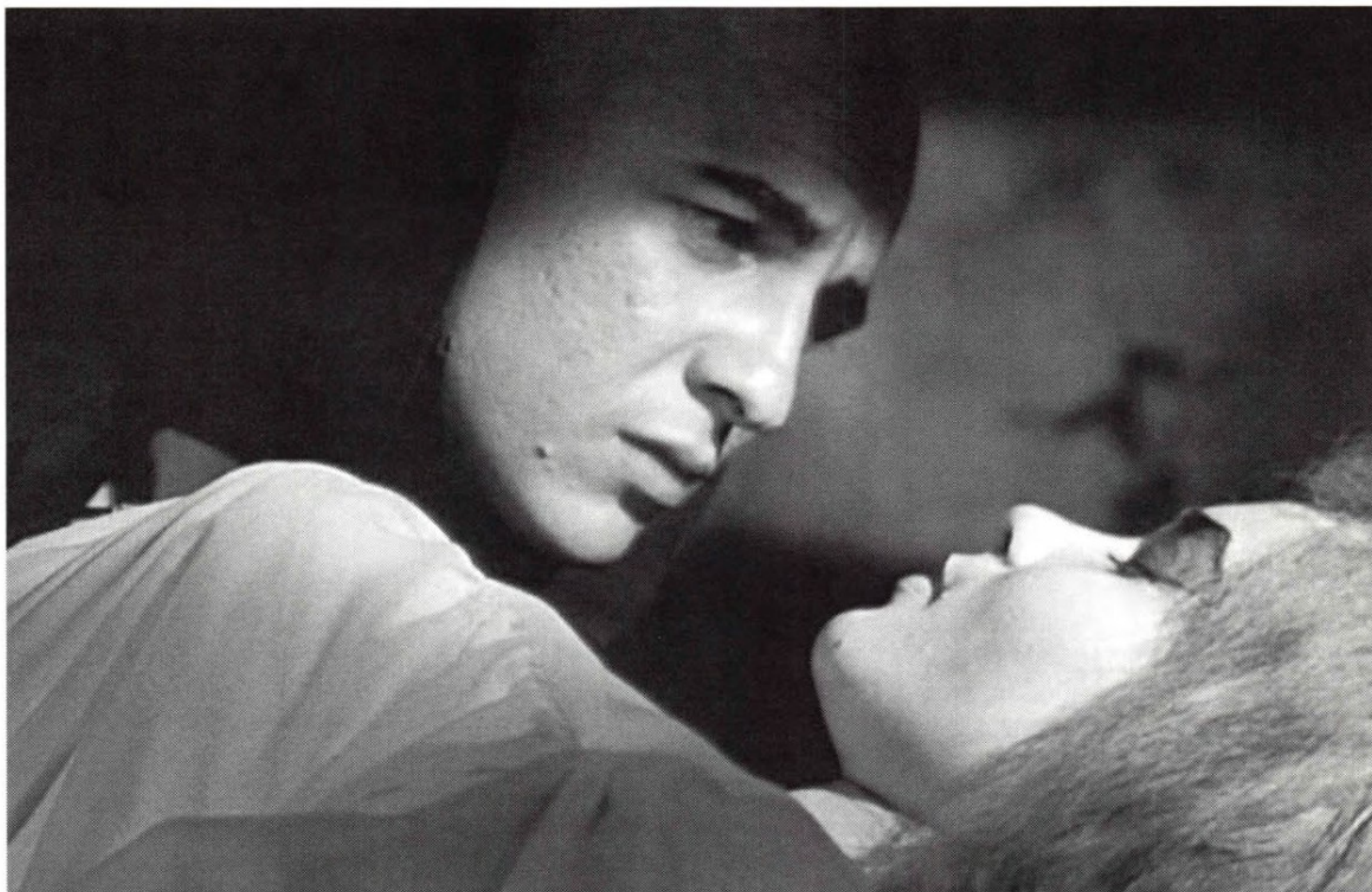
This unique twist on a well-explored mythology (adapted from a popular comic strip) told the tale of a Philippine village visited by a group of vampires led by the bald, aristocratic Dr. Marco (Ronald Remy). Accompanying Marco, along with his assistants (a dwarf, a hunchback and a physically perfect—though undead—female known as Tanya), is his lady love, Christina (Amalia Fuentes). Though a vampire herself, Christina is slowly dying—and Marco intends to save her by replacing her heart with that of her twin sister, Charita (also Fuentes), who resides in the village. Complicating

the issue for Charita is the return of her long-absent mother, Doña Marisa (Mary Walter), who has joined Marco's troupe. Complicating the issue for Marco is the arrival of the young, vacationing Victor (Eddie Fernandez), who is determined to rid the village of the vampire plague forever, be it with the help of the police or the power of the Church. But will their humble resistance be a match for a foe who might be the incarnation of Satan himself?

THE BLOOD DRINKERS is an extremely colorful film, though most of its footage was actually shot in B&W. It contains several full-color sequences, enough to justify Hemisphere's claim that it was a color picture, while its monochromatic scenes are specifically color-coded: blue tints signify nightfall, red tints herald the presence of the undead. (Pizor and Lynn would later turn down Sherman's suggestion that they perform a similar operation on another Filipino production called *Tagani*; Sherman and Adamson, of course, went on to transform the procedure into "Spectrum X" for what eventually became the Independent-International release **HORROR OF THE BLOOD MONSTERS**, but more on that later.) Top-billed Ronald Remy, under his real name of Ron Kukarichkin, attended classes at San Francisco State University in the late 1950s (where he worked with my father on at least one stage

production); years later, word filtered back to the college that the actor had changed his name and now had the reputation of being "the Marlon Brando of the Philippines." While this honorific was usually voiced with a hint of condescension, Remy is more than credible here—he cuts a perfectly menacing, authoritative figure which enhances de Leon's slowly building mood considerably. And while the slow build-up itself initially taxed the patience of some viewers (myself included), revisitation in an age of endless, interchangeable vampire thrillers calls special attention to its unique atmosphere and innovations—particularly in its depiction of Church and State (eg. the Law) joining forces. The flare pistols of the police provide an effective substitute for sunlight—but it's the power of prayer that provides Marco and Christina with possible liberation from the vampire curse itself. In a gratifying full-color sequence, the couple appear to be transported to the peace of a beautiful, sunlit garden—but it can't last if the Devil has anything to say about it. Admittedly, the film falls short of perfection by today's standards, thanks to some unconvincing genre trappings (Marco's bat-servant Basra, though popular with theatrical audiences of the late 1960s, is nothing more than a puppet on a string today), but as a work of macabre atmosphere, it is often extraordinary.

Ronald Remy (with Amalia Fuentes) as Dr. Marco, the lovesick vampire anti-hero of THE BLOOD DRINKERS.

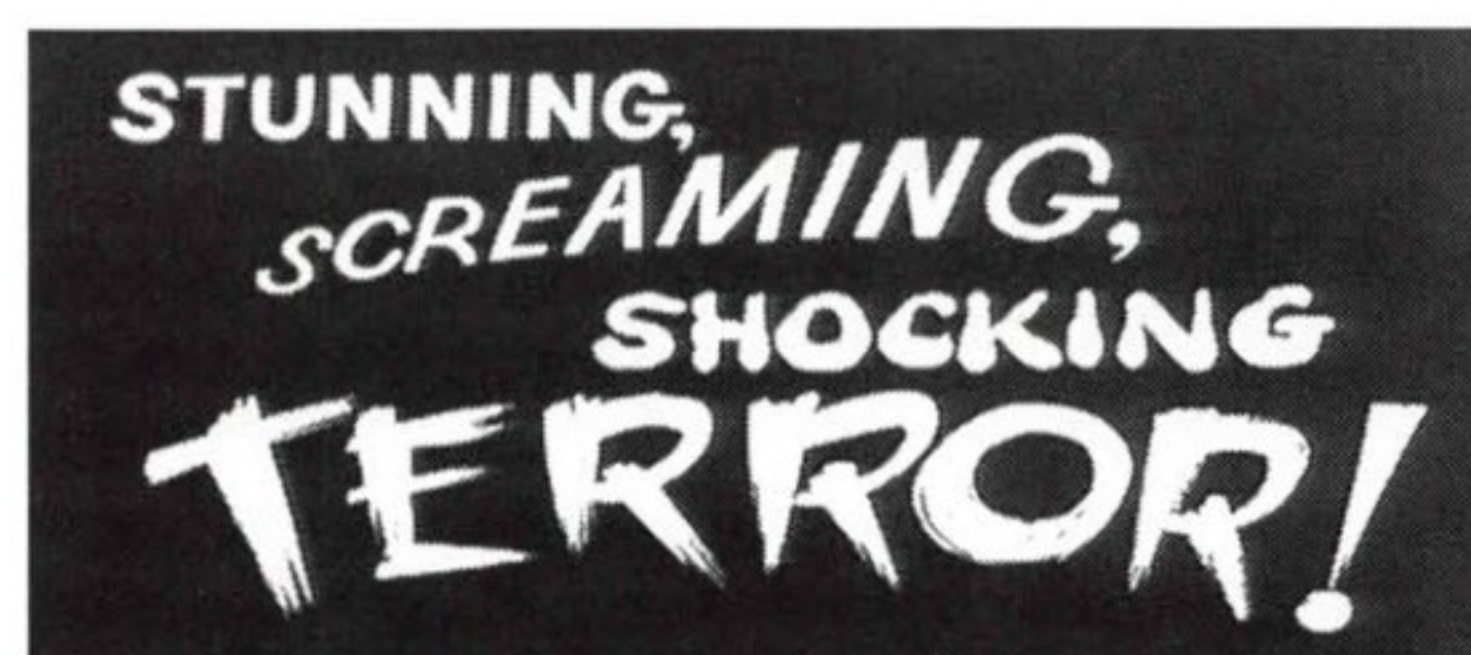


Sherman and Image Entertainment made sure that "The Blood Collection" got off to an impressive start with this, the first DVD in the series. It's remarkable even before you open the box, which bears not only **THE BLOOD DRINKERS** as the title, but the helpful subtitle "**(KULAY DUGO ANG GABI)**"—any reader of this magazine has got to love that. The disc opens with the original title card for **THE BLOOD DRINKERS**, which is followed by a new copyright notice in the name of both Hemisphere and Independent-International (the well-known I-I logo now opens every film in this series). The credits then begin in earnest. As the film has been meticulously remastered from the original elements, a producer credit for the ubiquitous Cirio H. Santiago is followed by the film's native title (see above—even those with no knowledge of Tagalog will have little trouble identifying *Dugo* as the word for "blood," thanks to its gory emphasis). The restoration goes well beyond the title sequence, however; as Sherman explains during his hour-long commentary, it was discovered during the restoration process that the film's original color-tint scheme had been incorrectly applied in all previous American prints of the film (red occasionally showed up where blue was intended, and vice versa)—including the re-issue and TV prints retitled **THE VAMPIRE PEOPLE** (previously available from Sinister Cinema). The error has been corrected, so that this DVD effectively represents the American premiere of de Leon's film in its intended version.

The standard image and the Dolby Digital 2.0 mono sound (both common to the collection) are more than adequate. But it doesn't stop there: while assembling the materials for this disc, Sherman also discovered some film canisters containing over 25m of silent outtake footage (some color, some tinted B&W), all of which has been included as a supplemental bonus. While most of this material involves exposition/character footage most likely cut to compact the feature for more convenient double-billing, it's easy to follow an interesting subplot in which a jealous, frustrated Tanya attempts to end the experiment by staking Christina, only to be caught in the act by a furious Marco.

The remaining supplements include a 17m 11s video interview with director Eddie Romero (the only surviving Hemisphere partner), who discusses his beginnings in the film business and various career highlights in an enjoyable talk (though he wasn't involved in this particular film, this interview appears on every "Blood Collection" disc). Also found on all series entries are theatrical trailers for this, the other films in the collection and

Sherman's **RAIDERS OF THE LIVING DEAD** (also now available from Image)—as well as the unrelated but fun "House of Terror" spook show promo. Exclusive to this disc is the **VAMPIRE PEOPLE** reissue trailer. Liner notes (which celebrate the feature in detail—read: huge spoilers—and the Hemisphere experience in general) are provided by Jim Arena, a freelance writer (and devoted Hemisphere fan) who now works in the same building where the company once had its offices; Arena does the honors for all six discs in the series. The first three discs share the same 24-image still gallery, but it has nothing to do with **THE BLOOD DRINKERS** (which has been assigned 14 chapters) and everything to do with Hemisphere's "Blood Island" films, the first of which is the second disc in the collection. (Provided one starts with **THE BLOOD DRINKERS**, Sherman's voice always announces which film is next in sequence, though none of the discs bear official volume numbers.)



Gerardo de Leon's TERROR IS A MAN [reviewed VW 54:69], on which Kane Lynn and Eddie Romero served as executive producers, introduced the concept and setting of "Blood Island." 1968's **BRIDES OF BLOOD**, co-directed by de Leon and Romero, could not truly be considered a sequel to the earlier film, but it chronicles more "monstrous" events at the same location. Reports of plant and animal mutation attributed to Pacific atomic testing brings a Peace Corps-style mission of mercy to Blood Island. The American contingent consists of government worker Jim Farrell (John Ashley, hot off his second bananaship in AIP's **BEACH PARTY** series), Dr. Paul Henderson (Kent Taylor, in the first of his numerous Hemisphere/Independent-International star turns) and his restless wife Carla (Beverly Powers, billed under her burlesque name "Beverly Hills"—which she had previously used for her cameo as the Widow in AIP's **THE COMEDY OF TERRORS**, 1963). The tone for their visit is set from the moment they arrive—they're just in time to see the natives disposing of some shredded human remains. After the initial formalities, the crew is met

FRIGHTENING
and
HORRIFYING
in every
Shocking Scene!



Gentleman John Ashley rushes to the aid of one of the BRIDES OF BLOOD.

by friendly, wealthy landowner Stephen Powers (Mario Montenegro) and his bald, brutish servant (Bruno Punzalan, a familiar face to many a fan of Filipino cinema). Farrell declines Powers' offer of lodging at his mansion (much to Carla's reluctance), since the natives can only be helped by people willing to live and work with them. The Americans certainly have their work cut out for them, as evidence of the mutations they suspect is all around them. Harmless insects transform into monsters before their eyes; the local plant life attacks passersby (even snatching a child at one point); and, most troubling of all, the natives regularly sacrifice maidens to a vicious, bloblike monster that stalks the night (one can see the complications coming a mile away when Farrell falls for Alma, the native chief's daughter, played by Eva Darren). Powers, on the other hand, insists that the radiation has done him a world of good, keeping him young beyond his years. But that might not be the only effect it's had...

Boasting plenty of gore, monsters and gyrating native women, **BRIDES OF BLOOD** was quite a crowd-pleaser in its day. During his 47m audio commentary, Sherman acknowledges the film's shortcomings—he's well aware of the popular criticism that the main monster resembles the Michelin Tire Man, and that a mutant butterfly somehow fails to

frighten—but some of the effects, such as the monster tree, do their job fairly well. (One of the shock moments awaiting unsuspecting TV viewers involved one of the tree's branches swinging a severed head directly into the camera lens—not even well-prepared censors could cut the scene, as it revealed the fate of a major character.) The acting is reasonably professional throughout, and the action moves along at an acceptable clip (not bad, considering it's the longest film in the collection). There's also an interesting surprise for fans of Japanese *kaiju* films: the native chant heard early in the film (and on the 15-chapter menu) was derived from Ishiro Honda's **ATRAGON** (1963)—the song goes out to "Manda... Manda, Manda, Manda..." Though hardly embraced by critics—Image's packaging for this and other titles in the collection resorts to such sources as the Internet Movie Database for positive remarks!—**BRIDES OF BLOOD** remains a durable drive-in favorite.

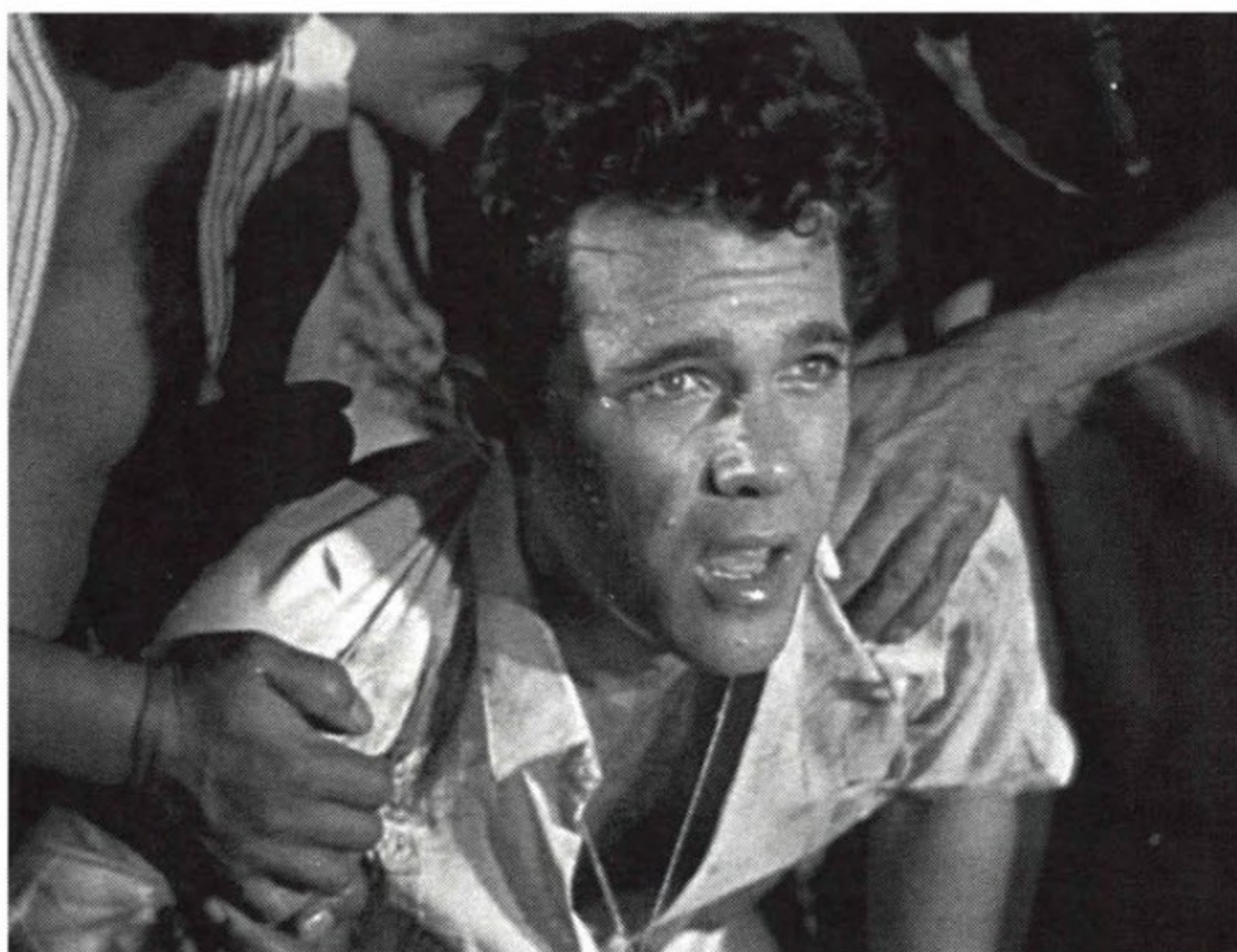
The film played television as **ISLAND OF LIVING HORROR**, and also turned up as one of several films hiding behind the generic exploitation title **GRAVE DESIRES** (patrons attending this attraction could just as easily have wound up seeing Leon Klimovsky's **THE VAMPIRE'S NIGHT ORGY** or another film altogether). I caught what might have been its last big-screen appearance in the late 1980s: the

Kent Taylor and Beverly Powers discover more than sunbathers on the beach in *BRIDES OF BLOOD*.



print, surprisingly, bore the original title, but had been subjected to the typical TV cuts—mainly the gratuitous stripping of the sacrificial victims. (On this disc, one such moment is used to illustrate a *menu screen*, which just goes to show that working with Something Weird Video has had an impact on the folks at Image!) Regal Video previously issued the film, *sans* original credits, as **BRIDES OF THE BEAST**; their print was uncut, but was one of the worst-looking transfers in home video history. Sherman goes on to explain that the trailer for the Hemisphere quadruple bill known as “Blood-O-Rama Shock Festival” advertised this film as **BLOOD BRIDES** (and the immediate follow-up as **BLOOD DOCTOR**), but that was just so that every feature listed in the trailer could start with the same buzzword—to his knowledge, no prints actually carried this substitute moniker. (The trailers for this program and the similar “Chiller Carnival of Blood,” emphasizing the Christopher Lee titles as they do, aren’t included in the “Blood Collection,” but can be found on Something Weird’s **BLOOD-O-RAMA SHOCK SHOW** compilation tape.)

The DVD substitutes a video recreation for the original title card for this and for all remaining titles in the series—considering the various journeys and mutations the films have endured over the years, this is completely understandable—while the film itself is completely intact. **BRIDES** suffers slight “crop damage” in its standard-frame rendition, most notably during the credit sequence, but all of the important action is visible, and the colors are sufficiently

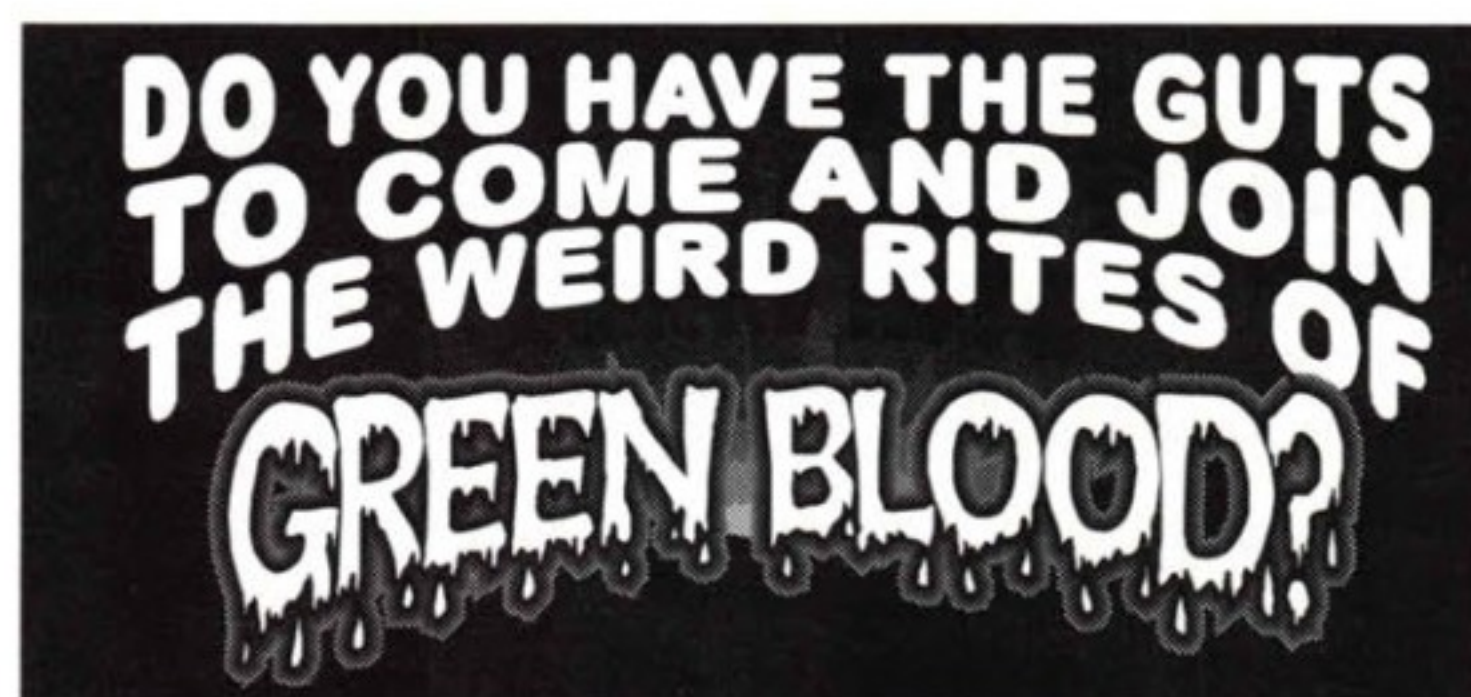


In the '60s, if you wanted your horror movies to have “Ee-Ooo,” you had to cast John Ashley!



The vegan answer to Frankenstein's Monster—The Chlorophyll Man—stalks the scariest scenes of MAD DOCTOR OF BLOOD ISLAND.

garish—the film is much better-looking than its own trailer on this disc, at any rate. The exclusive supplements found on this disc include a nine-image Beverly Hills pin-up gallery, an onscreen essay by Christopher William Koenig (who provides one for each “Blood Island” film) and a particularly happy bonus—the original 38s trailer advertising free “genuine imitation” wedding ring sets for all unmarried females attending the film.



Mutant transformations abound in BRIDES OF BLOOD.

The next film in the series, **MAD DOCTOR OF BLOOD ISLAND** was reviewed (along with its sequel) in VW 33:18. John Ashley, as Dr. Foster, is not reprising his **BRIDES OF BLOOD** character (though he might as well be), and no acknowledgment of that film's events is made here (though they might as well have been). But Blood Island is Blood Island, and fans continue to regard this as a “can't have one without the others” set of three. Angelique Pettyjohn contributes to the sex-and-skin quotient, Ronald Remy returns to take the lead villain's role, Bruno Punzalan reprises his brutal henchman, and the world is introduced to Don Ramon, affectionately known as “The Chlorophyll Man” (although that name is never actually invoked in the film), unquestionably the star monster of the entire Hemisphere lineup.

The film was previously released on the long-defunct Magnum Entertainment label—uncut and under its original (albeit video-generated) title,



*John Ashley and Angelique Pettyjohn take a liplock break from the horrors of **MAD DOCTOR OF BLOOD ISLAND**.*

while Sinister Cinema later issued a cut TV version under the meaningless title **TOMB OF THE LIVING DEAD**. Some confusion followed when Regal Video attempted to release it as **THE REVENGE OF DR. X**—their packaging and their own set of video-generated credits clearly identified the film viewers were *supposed* to be getting, but the movie on the tape turned out to be the (very) obscure plant-monster opus **THE DOUBLE GARDEN**, scripted by none other than Ed Wood. As rare as that item is today, even more scarce is Regal's *second* stab at getting it right. When the outfit re-released many of its titles on the New Horizons label (not to be confused with Roger Corman's company), a tape called **SCREAMS OF THE UNDEAD** once again purported to offer **MAD DOCTOR OF BLOOD ISLAND** to the public. Unfortunately, I've never seen more than the empty display box for this one—anyone with a copy of the actual video is urged to share the details! Though some grain and scratchiness was unavoidable, and taking into account the limitations of the original camerawork, the Image DVD presents the best-looking uncut rendition of the film (given 14 chapters in the menu) ever released on video. Again, the image is not letterboxed but the compositions do not look particularly cramped. The feature is preceded by the thrilling "Oath of Green Blood" as great an incentive to make a pitcher of lime Kool-Aid as you're likely to get.

In his 50m commentary, Sam Sherman describes the origin (and the constituent elements) of that notorious "Green Blood" giveaway promo and the Brother Theodore-narrated trailer; he courageously defends the near-epileptic use of the zoom lens to highlight the shock scenes; and tells us more about actor Ronald Remy (who was happy to have successfully grown his hair back for his turn as Dr. Lorca). While reportedly withdrawn and standoffish in his college years, Remy (as recalled by Sherman), was an agreeable, friendly professional who passed away all too soon while only in his 40s (Sherman does not recall the cause). We're also informed that this was the first Hemisphere release to receive an MPAA rating: it was awarded an

"M" at a time when they "didn't know what they were doing," while it might have trouble getting an "R" if submitted today. (The stills gallery includes a fan-favorite shot of Ashley and Pettyjohn that goes a little further, erotically speaking, than the film itself does.) Though a scene of animal sacrifice is retained, Sherman doesn't feel it was necessary to include it in the first place. Sherman considers **MAD DOCTOR OF BLOOD ISLAND** to be the best of the Hemisphere lineup, though he acknowledges that a fair number of fans prefer the sequel.

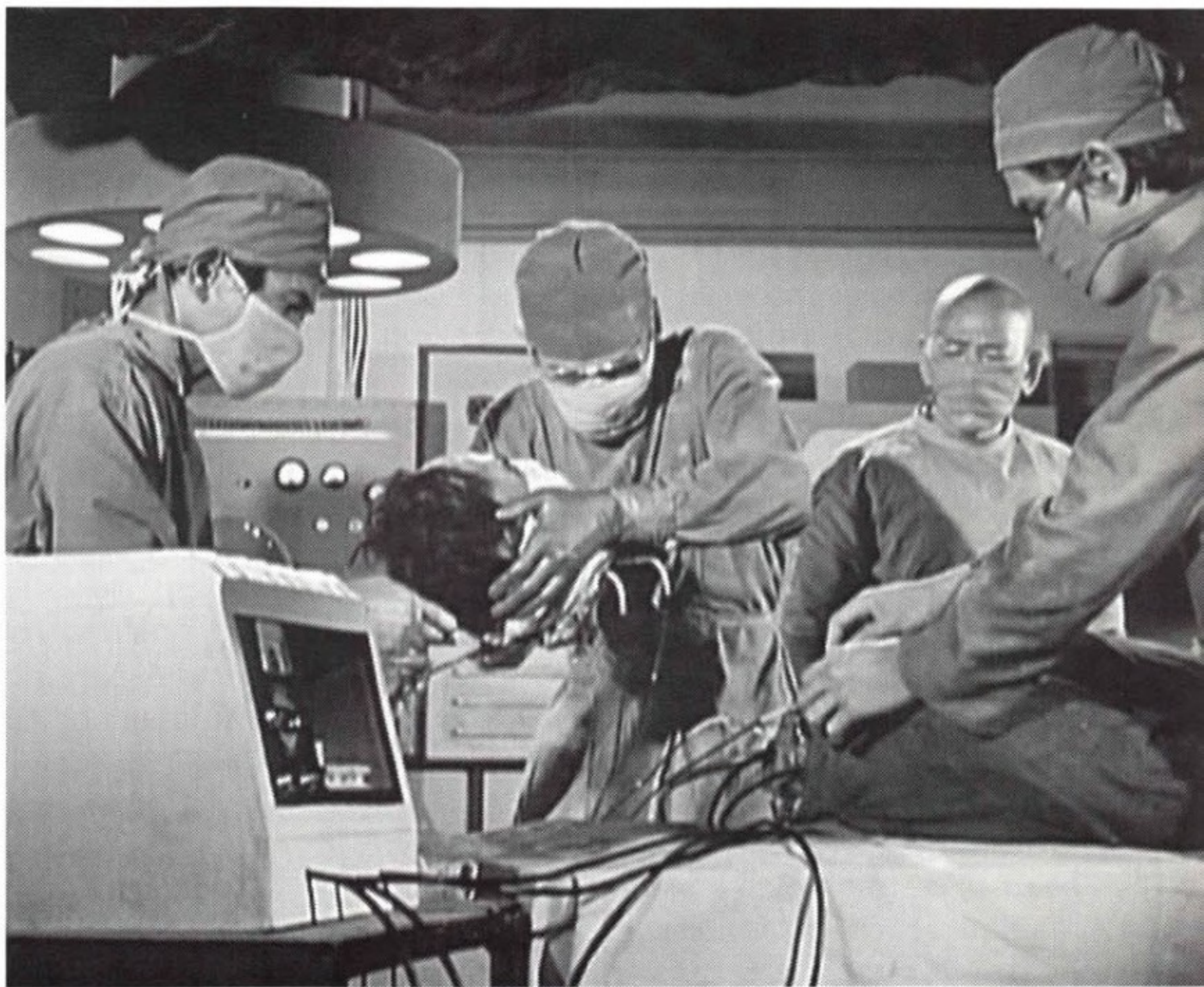
FANTASTIC FRIGHT — THE HORROR HEAD TRANSPLANT!

A month passed between the release of the first three and the last three discs in the "Blood Collection," allowing the addition of even more supplementary material—including at least one item that was meant to appear on an earlier release, but wasn't quite ready in time.

The second wave kicks off with **BEAST OF BLOOD**, in which John Ashley returns as Dr. Foster. Celeste Yarnall steps in for Angelique Pettyjohn

(whose character is blown-up offscreen before the credits even start), Beverly Miller (credited with the film's story, and frequently mistaken for an actor whom some viewers insist they've seen "lots of times") is pointed out by Sherman as a sea captain early in the film, and Eddie Garcia (a Filipino cinema mainstay who, reportedly, is still working today) takes over as Dr. Lorca, still trying to gain control of the (soon to be headless) Chlorophyll Man. An obscure VCI tape and the Sinister Cinema release both bore the TV title **BEAST OF THE DEAD** while showcasing the uncut film (evidence of the previously mentioned TV prints that escaped the censors unscathed). According to Christopher William Koenig's onscreen essay, VCI's tape featured less than satisfying color and accidentally repeated a scene—but Sinister's print was in better condition, unfortunately, than the one that has made it to DVD.

While it's likely that the original **BEAST OF BLOOD** title card will never be seen again, the remainder of Bob LeBar's animated credit sequence suffers here, as well. Most of the damage is covered up by still frames and slow-motion, but viewers familiar with the sequence will be annoyed—especially considering how intact the first three "Blood" discs



The legendary "horror head transplant" from BEAST OF BLOOD.

were—to find that the entire animated bit in which the Chlorophyll Man's head lifts and separates from his body is missing in action. Well-intended, but no less frustrating, is the restoration of the original day-for-night effect during most of Chapter 7 (out of 11), which involves Liza Belmonte's abortive attempt to seduce Dr. Foster—the sexy, brightly lit scene on the Sinister version is unwatchably drowned here in a sea of deep blue. White speckles are on view throughout most of the film, as well.

During his 53m commentary, Sherman describes the painstaking restoration process applied to the films in this series—while the effort is, by and large, extremely admirable, this is one case where "inferior" video elements might have come in handy, and it's unfortunate that Sherman chose this title to promise "every frame intact." The history of Hemisphere and the Blood Island films continues. Among other highlights, we're told a hilarious story (which probably didn't seem so funny at the time) in which John Ashley and several companions were ambushed by a guerilla squad which

The Chlorophyll Man returns to thrill you again in BEAST OF BLOOD.



announced their intention to kill the hated Americans. Ashley reportedly saved the day with the line "But I'm Italian—what do you want to kill me for?" Sherman adds that stories like this were part of the reason he declined when Pizor and Lynn implored him to come to the Philippines to personally assist in the productions! We also learn about one of Hemisphere's less-remembered gimmicks—in addition to the "survival kit" barf bags handed out at screenings of **BEAST OF BLOOD**, exhibitors were encouraged to litter the neighborhood around their theaters with phony \$10 bills that people would pick up, only to read "You'll get more than \$10 worth of entertainment when you see **BEAST OF BLOOD!**" Many a fan has pointed out a shot near the end of the film in which a crew member can be seen crouching behind the monster's detached head—Sherman observes that, while one's immediate reaction would be to improve the film by deleting the shot, today's fans (VW readers in particular, no doubt!) would never tolerate such an action. Sherman also makes an appeal to any listener who might have knowledge of the whereabouts of some of the spectacular artwork that adorned the campaigns for this and other films in the series.

Celeste Yarnall recalls some strenuous experiences of her own during a 9m 22s video interview conducted by Sherman at a recent Chiller Theater convention. The actress, who—unbeknownst to the producers—had just learned she was pregnant, suffered even more during the quicksand sequence than is apparent onscreen. Nevertheless, she has fond memories of the film (which she'll always associate with her healthy daughter) and she even treats us to her impersonation of the Chlorophyll Man ("Lorrcaaaa!"). 24 new stills have been added to the existing still gallery—while some of these are from the Blood Island films, others involve **BLOODTHIRSTY BUTCHERS**, **TORTURE DUNGEON** and **NIGHT OF THE BLOODY APES**, none of which were distributed by Hemisphere or Independent-International, though Sherman may have helped design their campaigns. Last but not least, the disc brings more missing footage to light—in this case, the film's original live action title sequence, which Sherman found lacking. Nevertheless, the deleted footage (of the Chlorophyll Man making his way back from the beach towards Dr. Lorca's laboratory) can now be seen, accompanied by its original score by Tito Arevalo—who wrote the music for all six films in the collection.

**A Blood-Dripping
BRAIN TRANSPLANT
turns a MANIAC into
a MONSTER!**

Following **BEAST OF BLOOD**, Romero and Ashley (now serving as co-producer), sought to continue the Blood Island series with **BEAST OF THE YELLOW NIGHT** [VW 89:46], using a script by Romero that Sherman found to be unsatisfactory. Ultimately, the project left Hemisphere and went on to become part of the first double-bill release from Roger Corman's New World Pictures. (Its co-feature, the West German Edgar Wallace thriller **CREATURE WITH THE BLUE HAND**, was reworked by Sherman at a much later date as **THE BLOODY DEAD**—which falls outside the scope of this article, but is also now available on DVD from Image.) In the meantime, a distraught Kane Lynn approached Sherman—who had recently founded Independent-International—for his help in supplying a quick replacement feature. Eventually agreeing, Sherman took as inspiration a recent news item regarding the death of Egyptian President Nasser, and hammered out the story for what eventually became **BRAIN OF BLOOD**. An initially puzzled Al Adamson was prevailed upon to direct the feature, and thus it came about that Independent-International created a film as a paid favor for what was, technically, a rival company!

Amir (Reed Hadley), ruler of the fictional mid-Eastern kingdom of Kalid, is dying of cancer—but a chance to preserve his life (not to mention his rule) lies in the hands of discredited American surgeon Dr. Trenton (Kent Taylor), who claims he can transplant Amir's brain into a new body. Dr. Bob Nigserian (**THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING MAN**'s Grant Williams) accompanies the Kalid contingent as they bring their now-deceased leader to Dr. Trenton, but is denied the privilege of assisting in the operation... as Trenton plans to cover his tracks by eliminating all witnesses (only Bob survives the subsequent assassination attempt carried out by Richard Smedley, the zombie from Adamson's **BLOOD OF GHASTLY HORROR**). Trenton plans to make do with the help of his own two assistants: the sadistic dwarf Dorro (Angelo Rossitto) and the retarded, disfigured giant



*Zandor Vorkov (aka Roger Engel) and Grant Williams ponder the pros and cons of cranial surgery for Reed Hadley in **BRAIN OF BLOOD**.*

Gor, played by John Bloom. (Both of these actors, of course, appeared in Adamson's **DRACULA VS. FRANKENSTEIN**: that film's Count, Zandor Vorkov—aka Roger Engel—can also be seen in a brief, but surprisingly credible, appearance as Mohammed, one of Amir's loyalists. That his voice isn't drowning in reverb here doesn't hurt.) When Gor fails to provide a suitable body in time for the operation, Trenton resorts to keeping Amir's brain alive in the body of Gor himself. Joining Taylor, Rossitto, Bloom, Vorkov and Smedley from the Sherman-Adamson stable are Vicki Volante (as one of several abductees that Dorro enjoys tormenting in the basement) and, of course, Mrs. Adamson herself, Regina Carrol (as Tracy, to whom Amir proposes on his deathbed).

This shamelessly sleazy, downbeat epic was shot on the cheap on unrecognizable locations in an effort to fool viewers into accepting it as part of Hemisphere's ongoing Filipino series. Adding to the persuasion is another go-round for Tito Arevalo's **MAD DOCTOR OF BLOOD ISLAND** score, but somehow the filmmakers neglected to include even one reference to Blood Island, an oversight which Sherman now regrets. But it worked—several published works, doubtlessly written by fans too lazy (or discerning) to actually

watch it, claim that this American production was at least partially filmed in the Philippines. Bob LeBar once again supplies animated titles, but these are among his least inspired—consisting solely of close-ups of skulls and brain tissue. The film has never looked particularly handsome (on the big screen or on video), but Image's DVD gives us **BRAIN OF BLOOD**—12 chapters of it—at its most colorful; the graphic (phony) brain transplant footage has never been more quease-inducing.

In the past, **BRAIN OF BLOOD** has been the subject of an okay release from Magnum Entertainment, a typical, credit-less Regal edition simply called **THE BRAIN**, and a Canadian release known as **BRAIN DAMAGE** (not likely to be confused with the Frank Henenlotter film)—all complete in regard to content. While we haven't viewed Sinister's release, it, too, should be uncut, but it may bear the TV title **THE CREATURE'S REVENGE**. The first time I caught this film, a sadistic flashback in which two redneck goons pour battery acid on Gor's face after playing "keep away" with his toy gun was cut from the print, resulting in much confusion when, later in the film, Gor (now housing Amir's brain and speaking in the voice of Reed Hadley) sees a young boy (the son of cinematographer Gary Graver, who had no involvement

in this film) playing with a similar toy gun and lurches after him, calling "Mine! Mine!" Although Sherman brushes off suggestions that this story would have been at home in a Universal thriller of the 1940s, it must be acknowledged that the grisly brain operation and the presence of an intelligent mind in a monstrous body look ahead to Terence Fisher's **FRANKENSTEIN AND THE MONSTER FROM HELL** (1973). Sherman wishes that a more effective makeup than the putty-faced "egghead" look given to Gor had been used in the film, but he deflects any deeper criticism by stating, matter-of-factly, that the film was made as quickly and inexpensively as possible in order to fill a specific need, and that it did its job. Case closed.

Sherman has plenty more to offer in this, his longest commentary track in the series, which runs a full 71m. Here, he discusses the breakup of Pizor and Lynn (both would ultimately provide their services for Independent-International) and the story of how he came to meet and hire Reed Hadley (he literally spotted and recognized the RACKET SQUAD star walking down the street!) Also related is the sad story of Regina Carrol's last days (though she maintained a positive attitude, her lingering death by cancer was about as effective an anti-smoking testimonial as could be imagined) and Adamson's ceaseless hope that he could keep her alive just long enough for a cure to be found. While he can't directly credit Carrol's demise to Adamson's own untimely death at the hands of a murderer, he allows that the experience left the director uncommonly vulnerable to such dangers. On a more upbeat note, Sherman plays the showman by directing the listener to at least three other commentaries: in addition to the aforementioned **THE BLOODY DEAD**, more on Angelo Rossitto can be heard on his track for **DRACULA VS. FRANKENSTEIN**, while the further adventures of Richard Smedley are recounted on **THE NAUGHTY STEWARDESSES**.

The exclusive supplement to be found here is a 20m 18s video interview with Beverly Powers, originally intended for inclusion on the **BRIDES OF BLOOD** disc, in which she answers questions sent to her by Sherman regarding her experiences while making that earlier picture (which she remembers as "BRIDES OF BLOOD ISLAND," its working title). The silver-haired, vivacious Powers, seen in her home in Hawaii, is a gracious, charming

hostess even when some of her stories are less than appetizing. She recounts how she forced herself to react politely when the local villagers honored her with the gift of a roasted pig's head; she also remarks on the primitive accommodations (and plumbing facilities), remembers having her breasts covered in masking tape to ensure her privacy as she was stripped by the Michelin monster, and admits to being genuinely frightened of Bruno Punzalan. As out of place as this interview may be on this disc, Image's gamble—that those who invest in any part of the set will eventually want the whole thing—is likely to pay off, and this sales device seems oddly appropriate for a celebration of Hemisphere Pictures.

FILMED AT THE REAL TOMBS of HORROR!

Also strange but appropriate is the handling of the film reviewed in VW 78:49 as **CURSE OF THE VAMPIRES** (a follow-up, perhaps, but not an actual sequel to **THE BLOOD DRINKERS**). This, the only film in the series that didn't have to undergo a title change for television—as it didn't have the word "blood" in its title—has now been rechristened **BLOOD OF THE VAMPIRES**! Not only that, but it's being treated as the last film in the set,

Amalia Fuentes as Leonore, a member of the Escodero family infected with the BLOOD OF THE VAMPIRES.



although it actually played on a double bill with **BEAST OF BLOOD** and carries a title card that reads, "Copyright 1970 by Beast of Blood Company." Sam Sherman didn't think much of putting the two films together—though he admits it's an exaggeration, he claimed that audiences who stayed for both films would see Eddie Garcia age twenty years! However, the two Gerardo de Leon vampire films make pretty good bookends—and, as Sherman has the least to say about this particular film (the on-screen action of which he rarely refers to), he chose this track to present the 45m

conclusion of the Hemisphere story, encompassing the studio's turn to action thrillers and WIP pictures, its eventual dissolution, and the activities of Irwin Pizor and Kane W. Lynn until their respective deaths.

Though Sherman doesn't specifically say so, it is apparent that an original title sequence was again replaced with Bob LeBar animated credits and a restatement of the **MAD DOCTOR** theme; Tito Arevalo tracks previously heard in **THE BLOOD DRINKERS** turn up in the film, as well, indicating that the film was either rescored by Hemisphere with cues they had on hand, or that **THE BLOOD DRINKERS** was itself scored with library tracks. But the titles in this instance are in fine shape, demonstrating right away that the color and clarity on display here is superior to that of Retromedia's previously reviewed "murky transfer" disc—and while that disc's slight letterbox is not present here, there's no noticeable damage to the compositions. The film also played briefly as **CREATURES OF EVIL**, but has not surfaced on video under that title in this country. As Sherman winds down his commentary, he refers to supplements that he hopes will appear on the disc. Outtake footage from the film, though apparently recently discovered by Sherman, fails to materialize on the DVD. We're also told the story behind Sherman's successful student film **THE WEIRD STRANGER** in the optimistic belief that it, too, may turn up as a supplement here—setting the viewer up for another disappointment (though the short



*Eduardo Escodero (Eddie Garcia) perpetuates the curse bestowed upon him by his own mother in **BLOOD OF THE VAMPIRES**.*

can be found on the **RAIDERS OF THE LIVING DEAD** double-disc set). In the end, save for the commentary, **BLOOD OF THE VAMPIRES** (an 11-chapter affair) has no supplements to truly call its own—but it's unthinkable that anyone could feel shortchanged at this point, unless they bought only this title out of the six available. But wait—there's more!

**CREATURES
of EVIL—
DRINKING THE
BLOOD of the
INNOCENT!**

Though not part of Image's "Blood Collection" proper, also available is yet another blood-in-the-title import/mutation from Independent-International, without which no discussion of the topic could be quite complete. Perhaps the late Al Adamson's best-known project next to **DRACULA VS. FRANKENSTEIN, HORROR OF THE BLOOD MONSTERS** has never been particularly difficult to find on home video. However, accurate information regarding this strange, composite feature has been remarkably obscure over the years, and it's this factor that makes Image Entertainment's DVD release definitive.



Director Al Adamson himself appears as one of the vampires in the opening montage of *HORROR OF THE BLOOD MONSTERS*.

The space vehicle XB-13 (which carries, among others, John Carradine as Dr. Rynning and Bruce Powers as crew leader Captain Scott) makes an unplanned landing on a distant planet. While the frail Rynning remains on board, the other crew members set off on an exploration mission, encountering “snake men” (live snakes grow from the shoulders of humanoid beings), “bat demons” and other monstrosities; as well as two warring native tribes—the Tagani and the fanged, fearsome Tubatan. Thanks to Rynning’s radioed instructions, they’re able to perform a quick bit of brain surgery on a Tagani woman (Jennifer Bishop) so that they might communicate with her in English—but it may be too late for her input to do them any good. As the colors of the spectrum continue to fluctuate, it gradually becomes apparent that not only the crew, but the entire planet, may be doomed.

Sam Sherman (who served in various capacities on this project, while Adamson received credit as both producer and director) recorded an audio commentary in 1999 for a never-released Roan Group laserdisc of this title, and the track now makes its debut on Image’s DVD. As it begins, Sherman requests that the viewer/listener pay strict attention, as well we might: there’s quite a story here that only Sherman can tell, and there are also some notorious bits of misinformation that need to be corrected. First of all, the widely-held belief that this feature was released under a countless multitude of alternate

titles is false: **HORROR OF THE BLOOD MONSTERS** was sold to television as **VAMPIRE MEN OF THE LOST PLANET**, and was re-released to theaters as **SPACE MISSION TO THE LOST PLANET** in the wake of **STAR WARS**. While other titles may have been considered at one point or another, no print of the film was ever exhibited under any of them. It is also untrue that the bulk of the “other-worldly” material came from an “unknown” Filipino production—the Filipino film in question was the aforementioned **TAGANI**. It was directed by Rolf Bayer, and an English-language version was even prepared to attract US distributors. Sherman and Adamson both found parts of **TAGANI** attractive, but the film’s B&W photography made it a hard sell.

Inspired by the color tinting applied to **THE BLOOD DRINKERS** by director Gerardo de Leon, the duo suggested that Hemisphere Pictures might do something similar for **TAGANI**, but the company passed on the opportunity. Eventually (circa 1967), Adamson constructed a space adventure around the **TAGANI** footage: the material with Carradine, Powers, *et al* was shot in full color, while the concept of “chromatic radiation” in the atmosphere of what was now an alien planet was created to explain the various color tints applied to the Filipino footage. Jennifer Bishop was cast as a double for one of the Tagani women in order to enhance the illusion of interaction—which was initiated by shooting the new material at the Vasquez Rocks, which provided an acceptable facsimile of the **TAGANI** terrain. But the project still wasn’t quite ready for release; two *more* enhancements would take place over the next several years. As Robert Dix (son of Richard) and Vicki Volante had been cast as the ground control team of Manning and Valerie during Adamson’s first shooting session, the actors were called back to reprise their roles in a couple of scenes to be inserted later: adding a little “futuristic” sex (colored light tubes and sirens enhance their non-explicit activity in an unspecified manner) and shedding a little more (multicolored) light on the “chromatic radiation” phenomenon. And finally, a prologue (shot on stock that doesn’t even come close to matching the rest of the film) was created, in which it is suggested that a plague of vampiric activity on Earth has been traced to the deadly “Tubatan vampires,” necessitating a space mission to strike

at the heart of the menace! (Never mind that the XB-13 is supposed to have wound up on the planet *accidentally!*) Adamson himself makes a rare on-screen appearance here as one of the vampires, the audience is alerted to the color tinting to come (the process, of course, is trumpeted in the opening credits as "Spectrum-X"), and Brother Theodore [Gottlieb] provides the over-the-top narration, honors he would also perform for the film's trailer. With this prologue, and a Robert Barr-animated title sequence (both set to music that would next be heard in **DRACULA VS. FRANKENSTEIN**) appended, the project finally hit theaters and drive-ins in 1970.

Economic in its own production values, but amazingly extravagant in the lengths it goes to tie everything together, **HORROR OF THE BLOOD MONSTERS** is outlandish enough to demand attention. While neither the acting nor the special effects are anything remarkable, one can see what drew Sherman and Adamson to **TAGANI**: the battle scenes are energetic, and the creatures (particularly the bat demons—diminutive actors in furry, winged suits) are quite entertaining. And the film itself becomes even more interesting when Sherman provides the blow-by-blow. Far more engaging details await discovery than could possibly be covered in this review—and if Sherman's tone occasionally takes on a mocking quality, he's always quick to differentiate between what deserves to be taken seriously and what doesn't.

While the DVD quality is a given plus, the standard format presentation of the feature remains essentially unchanged from the original Super Video VHS release, or the VidAmerica "World's Worst Videos" reissue. The Genesis tape **HORRORS OF THE RED PLANET**, often misidentified as a video retitling of this item, is actually **THE WIZARD OF MARS**—and neither film ever featured Lon Chaney, though the box suggested otherwise. (The retitling mistake may have originated from the fact that all shots of the XB-13 spaceship in Adamson's film consist of footage recycled from **WIZARD**.) A layer change at 67m 24s is unobtrusive unless one is listening to the commentary track. The two-channel mono sound is just fine, and 12 chapters have been assigned to the feature. The viewer is invited to either



A scene from the unreleased Filipino film TAGANI, color-tinted through the miracle of "Spectrum X" in HORROR OF THE BLOOD MONSTERS.

"Begin the Bloodsucking" or "Pick a Color," while the option "Additional Blood Types" leads to further supplements. The **BLOOD MONSTERS** trailer is on hand (in hideous, over-solarized condition), as are the trailers common to all of the "Blood Collection" titles, as well as the "House of Terror" spook-show promo. A particularly nice bonus is an English-language trailer for **TAGANI** itself—freshly copyrighted to Independent-International in 2002, though no release of the unadulterated feature has been announced—nor has it been included here, lamentably.

In the beginning, the "Blood" movies were innovative, successfully-promoted exploitation perennials. Then they became an eye-popping surprise package on television. And now, "The Blood Collection" returns as one of the most entertaining lessons in film history ever made available on home video. Sherman's commentaries are really worthy of being transcribed, edited and compiled together in book form. Even the most critically-scorned titles in the series (**BRAIN OF BLOOD** being the likely winner) have been given fresh context and new reasons to warrant our continued attention—and those of us who have always enjoyed them can look upon this series as vindication.

While not available as a box set (yet, at least), the purchase of any individual title in "The Blood Collection" is likely to leave one wanting more—and the best part of that is that even when the "Blood Collection" runs out, there's still *plenty* more where that came from.





UFO



Reviewed by John Charles

Shortly after producing **DOPPELGÄNGER** (released stateside by Universal as **JOURNEY TO THE FAR SIDE OF THE SUN**), Gerry Anderson was approached by British TV mogul Lew Grade about launching his first live action TV series. The resulting program, **UFO**, is often derided as being nothing more than a flesh-and-blood reworking of previous Anderson "Supermarionation" ventures like **THUNDERBIRDS** and **CAPTAIN SCARLET AND THE MYSTERONS**, but that approach was certainly understandable given the popularity of those programs. Set in the far-flung future year of 1980, **UFO**'s production designers posited that the most extreme fashion trends of the 1960s would simply carry on unabated, so the show delivers a futuristic Britain that manages to look more dated than films and television series produced ten years earlier (and, in an amusing concession to the American market, everyone drives on the *right* side of the road). Despite placing women in major positions of authority, the costume designs (by Sylvia Anderson) are completely sexist and the camera is forever ogling the actresses' tightly uniformed bodies. There is also an amusing amount of smoking and

drinking going on. That said, **UFO** actually holds up fairly well within its limitations. Viewers who first saw it as children may be surprised by how legitimately entertaining and imaginative several of the episodes still are.

Anderson himself directed the premiere installment, "Identified" (51m 12s), which does a good job of laying out the series' premise and introducing all of the principals and their high-tech hardware. When a hostile alien race is discovered operating on Earth, governments respond by creating a clandestine organization called **SHADO** (Supreme Headquarters Alien Defence Organization), which is headquartered 80 feet *under* a British film studio. In addition to its surface operations, **SHADO** also maintains a base on the Moon which

UFO SET 1

1969/70, A&E Home Video,
DD-2.0/MA/+, \$79.95, 643m 19s, DVD-1

Guest star George Cole plays a SHADO traitor given the chance to redeem himself in "Flight Path."

tracks saucer movements, a fleet of fighters, and a combination submarine/aircraft called Skydiver. Worried by the recent destruction of a weapons manufacturing plant, SHADO's stern, by-the-book commander Ed Straker (Brooklyn-born Ed Bishop, sporting a white wig that nicely offsets his piercing blue eyes) assigns Colonel Alec Freeman (**GET CARTER**'s George Sewell) to accompany a shipment of new equipment that will aid in the spotting of UFOs in deep space. One of the saucers manages to get into the Earth's atmosphere but is taken out by Skydiver. An alien pilot is recovered, giving Earth its first look at the beings, which are very similar in character to humans. However, analysis reveals that many of the invader's innards were taken from human beings, explaining why many victims of previous UFO incidents were found minus these same major organs.

The episode features an audio commentary by Anderson, in which he discusses the series' origins, some of the production's challenges, and his impressions of the program now. It's a good talk and, in a touch we would like to see used more often, only the program's music and effects track is heard in the background, so Anderson's comments never have to compete with the characters' dialogue for our attention. Also included with this instalment are alternate opening and

closing sequences. The former (a prologue set in 1970) features some extremely bloody bullet hits that obviously would have violated most countries' TV standards of the time. The latter is an abridged version of the final reel, dropping the downbeat finale.

In Dave Lane's "Computer Affair" (49m 10s), Freeman is sent to the moonbase on a monthly inspection tour just when a UFO destroys one of SHADO's interceptors. The blame would seem to fall on Moonbase commander Lt. Gay Ellis (**AU PAIR GIRLS**' Gabrielle Drake) and the two surviving pilots (including **THE OBLONG BOX**'s Harry Baird as Lt. Mark Bradley), who are sent back to SHADO headquarters for an investigation. Meanwhile, the saucer has successfully reached Earth and crashlands in the Canadian wilderness. Freeman is dispatched to the area and takes Ellis and Bradley along as part of his team. The base computer concluded that Ellis' attraction to Bradley resulted in her giving evasive coordinates to him before transmitting them to a pilot who was in more desperate need. Freeman hopes to disprove this by re-testing the theory under fire. Although "Computer Affair" was among the first episodes produced, it was the 21st to air and one can see why ITC postponed it; aside from the extensive model work (which includes some nicely designed

SHADO battles aliens stranded in the Canadian wilderness in "The Computer Affair."





SHADO commander Ed Straker (Ed Bishop) must decide between duty and family in "A Question of Priorities," the series' finest hour.

SHADO landrovers), there is little here to engage viewers who might still be undecided about whether to continue watching the program on a regular basis. There is a fairly seamless layer change at 26:47.

George Cole (the young Ebenezer Scrooge in the 1951 version of **A CHRISTMAS CAROL**) guest stars as Roper, a SHADO technician being blackmailed by some collaborating humans in Ken Turner's "Flight Path" (49m 30s). The traitors seek to get their hands on some classified information, threatening to kill Roper's beautiful young wife (Sonia Fox) unless their demands are met. Roper turns over the secret figures to the enemy and it's up to Straker and company to figure out just what the numbers (a puzzling mixture of coordinates and time figures) mean, before a UFO attack can occur. The main point of interest in this episode is the clash of styles demonstrated by Straker and Freeman, a running theme in the series. Freeman is an old friend of Roper and objects to a plan concocted by Straker to use the (now) disgraced man as a pawn to lure out the enemy operatives. Freeman also disapproves of a vital piece of information being withheld from Roper prior to the latter's participation in a dangerous mission meant to demonstrate his renewed

loyalty to SHADO. Tony Barwick's script contains some serious lapses in logic, but the climax is effective and the episode (which aired 15th) ultimately worthwhile.

A UFO breaks through the defense perimeter and heads towards Earth in David Lane's "Exposed" (49m 24s). Its flight path crosses that of a test aircraft and, when a SHADO interceptor destroys the invader, the blast knocks the intruding test craft out of orbit and it crashes, killing one of the pilots. Survivor Paul Foster (Michael Billington) insists on a hearing, refusing to let the incident be swept under the rug. Even though surveillance film has been doctored to remove all traces of the saucer, Foster persists, and his resolve is further boosted when the dead man's sister (Jean Marsh) comes forward and accuses him of being responsible for the tragedy. Tony Barwick's

script openly paints SHADO as the villains of the piece, a daring approach for the second (aired) episode of a series that had just premiered and was trying to win a following. The resolution, of course, changes one's perspective and also provides a satisfactory way for Foster to join the SHADO team. Semi-regular Vladěk Šejbal (**FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE**) appears in the episode as a slick SHADO headshrinker/interrogator who tries to convince Foster that he saw nothing. Different edits of two scenes (oddly labelled in the menu as "Video Outtakes") from this episode are included as extras. Both are in excellent condition but the audio track lacks some of the dialogue, as it was apparently never looped.

In the opening minutes of "Survival" (48m 28s), a lone alien fires his weapon at a moonbase cabin viewport, causing depressurization and the death of a crewman. When aerial tracking photos reveal that the being's ship is concealed within a crater, Straker recognizes the force's best chance to get their hands on an intact saucer. However, the mission goes awry and Col. Foster finds himself stranded miles from base with a malfunctioning communicator. Presumed dead, he will have to make it back himself before his air supply runs out. Before he can do this, however, the remaining alien (Gito Santana) takes him prisoner and desires that he perform a most unexpected task. In a subplot, Harry Baird's Lt. Bradley character is offered command of the moonbase but is reluctant to

accept, for fear that, as a black man, racial prejudice might impede his ability to effectively lead. Director Alan Perry and composer Barry Gray create an effectively ominous atmosphere during the lunar sequences and the episode turns out to be an interesting precursor to **ENEMY MINE**. There is a poorly chosen layer change at 24:46 which causes a walking character to freeze midstep.

"Conflict" (49m 28s), from director Ken Turner, opens in 1968 with the Apollo 8 mission crew concluding operations and heading home. Jumping forward to "present" day, a SHADO craft is forced into a fatal atmospheric descent by a sophisticated alien mine hidden amongst the Apollo 8 remnants. Unfortunately for Straker, the head of the commission in charge of financing is intent on seeing SHADO's budget curtailed and forces a temporary shutdown of all lunar flights, leaving the moonbase isolated and the Earth vulnerable to saucer attack. Despite using the Apollo 8 mission as the foundation of its fiction, this is an unremarkable and largely uninvolved episode, of interest only for its extensive model work and Straker's climactic gambit, which risks the destruction of SHADO's Earth control center.

Alan Perry's "The Dalotek Affair" (49m 28s) gets off to a curious start by including a seemingly extraneous prologue, set in 1969, featuring real life scientist Dr. Frank E. Stranges, President of the National Investigation Committee on UFOs. Interviewed as if he were appearing on an afternoon talk show, the doctor earnestly quotes several prominent figures of the time (including Congressman Gerald Ford!) on the subject of unidentified flying objects. Back in the future, the presence of Dalotek, a private corporation conducting surveys on the Moon, seems to be the reason behind a series of inexplicable communications disruptions plaguing SHADO's operations. When a shuttle crash results in the death of two men, Dalotek's operations are forcibly shut down by SHADO but the problem persists, leaving both camps open to saucer attack. The aliens, of course, are behind it all and Straker comes up with the solution by rewatching the Stranges interview! This might have been a fairly effective episode, but the flashback gimmick is not effectively utilized.

"A Question of Priorities" (49m 45s) is a superior teleplay that finds Straker torn between his duties as SHADO commander and as the father of young Johnny (Barnaby Shaw). The boy is hit by a car and requires a special, newly developed drug as yet available only in America. Straker arranges for a SHADO craft to bring it from New

York but, while this mission is in progress, a UFO lands in Ireland and its pilot assembles a transmitting device that homes in on SHADO frequencies. Director David Lane develops a nice degree of suspense by cutting between the parallel events of SHADO search teams investigating the UFO crash site, and the activities of the alien, who has set up shop in the country home of an elderly blind woman (**THE CAMP ON BLOOD ISLAND**'s Mary Merrall). Col. Freeman, unaware of the reason for the New York transport ship, diverts it off-course, in order to pinpoint the alien's position. Aware that this is a veritable death sentence for Johnny, Straker must decide whether to continue with the mission or save the life of his boy. Compounding his guilt is the boy's mother (Suzanne Neve), who knows nothing of Straker's true duties and blames him for ruining their marriage. While retaining the resolutely stoic nature of his character, Bishop does an effective job of conveying Straker's anxieties and frustrations, and the episode is rightly regarded as one of the series' finest. The layer change is invisibly placed during a commercial break point at 23:58.

One of the more dated episodes, Ken Turner's "Ordeal" (49m 26s), opens with a mod party where everyone is dancing to The Beatles' "Get Back"—

Michael Billington as Col. Paul Foster.



which, true enough, would still be a beloved song in 1980. While undergoing a physical at a SHADO health farm, Foster is kidnapped by two aliens. Straker decides that, for the sake of base security, the craft that likely has him must be shot down. However, the interceptor pilot (who had just finished serving on a mission with Foster) intentionally misses and the saucer crashes on the Moon. Foster survives but the aliens have converted his respiratory system and returning to him normal will be quite dangerous. This is a dull and thoroughly predictable outing; we are never even given a good look inside the aliens' craft, let alone a clearer idea of their motives, and the medical procedure is disappointingly simplistic. As for the wrap-up, the less said the better. It is easy to see why ITC procrastinated about airing this poor effort, which waited until the #19 slot.

Platter #4 offers the final four episodes, beginning with "The Square Triangle" (49m 32s). Desperate to learn more about the enemy, Straker allows a saucer to slip through SHADO defenses in the hopes of capturing it intact on Earth. The craft lands in the English countryside but the sole inhabitant is forced to destroy it when his environment suit is damaged by the local game warden's guard dog. The being's arrival corresponds with a plot cooked up by twenty-something Cass (**THE DEVIL RIDES OUT**'s Patrick Mower) and middle-aged Liz (**A CLOCKWORK ORANGE**'s Adrienne Corri) to eliminate the latter's

Semi-regular Vladek Sheybal, seen here in "Court Martial."



husband, who is due home later that evening. Naturally, the alien wanders into the premises and throws a monkey wrench into their carefully planned scenario. What seems like a tired and uninspiring episode is salvaged somewhat by David Lane's direction and an effective final act twist, from writer Alan Pattilo, that re-emphasizes the sometimes callous methods SHADO must utilize to maintain its secrecy.

Every series involving a military organization has at least one episode like "Court Martial" (49m 33) and most follow a standard template. When a major security breach is discovered at SHADO headquarters, evidence points to Col. Foster, who is put before a military tribunal. The prosecuting attorney (Vladek Sheybal) paints a very damning picture, particularly when Foster's Swiss bank account shows a recent deposit of \$10,000. The accused is sentenced to death, leaving Straker and Freeman with only a small window of time to locate contrary evidence before the execution takes place. The mechanics of the plot are overly familiar and the resolution does not really hold water, but director Ron Appleton makes good use of various standing sets on the British MGM studio backlot (which serve as the fictional movie company's stages located above SHADO HQ) to provide an atypical backdrop for this scenario. There is a brief but very noticeable instance of digital breakup at 43:51.

SHADO hopes to get a glimpse of their opponents' homeworld, via a powerful new telescopic camera, in Alan Perry's "Close Up" (48m 58s). Straker's plan is to lure a UFO into range and then somehow drive it back on a course for home. The probe will follow and transmit a picture of the alien planet when it is within a distance of two million miles. Everything goes as planned and the probe pursues its target, but an unexpected defect arises. The storyline does not amount to much, but fans of the program's miniature hardware will be in heaven, as Derek Meddings' effects are plentiful and liberally sprinkled throughout the episode. There is also some amusingly awkward flirting from the perpetually aloof Straker, directed towards the beautiful Lt. Ellis, which hints that a relationship may blossom later in the season.

The set concludes with David Lane's "Confetti Check A-O.K." (49m 25s), an attempt to further develop Ed Bishop's character, while also providing a look at the early days of SHADO. Suzanne Neve returns as Mary Straker and we see that her dissatisfaction with the secrecy involved in her husband's line of work began



Col. Freeman (George Sewell) and Lt. Ellis (Gabrielle Drake) on the job in Skydiver.

almost immediately after their wedding. We also learn that Straker previously enjoyed a far more congenial relationship with General Henderson (**FIVE MILLION YEARS TO EARTH**'s Grant Taylor), who would soon become a particularly obstinate nemesis. While only moderately interesting, the episode provides a nice bookend to the flashback sequences in "Identified" and effectively sets up the couples' post-marital conflict in "A Question of Priorities."

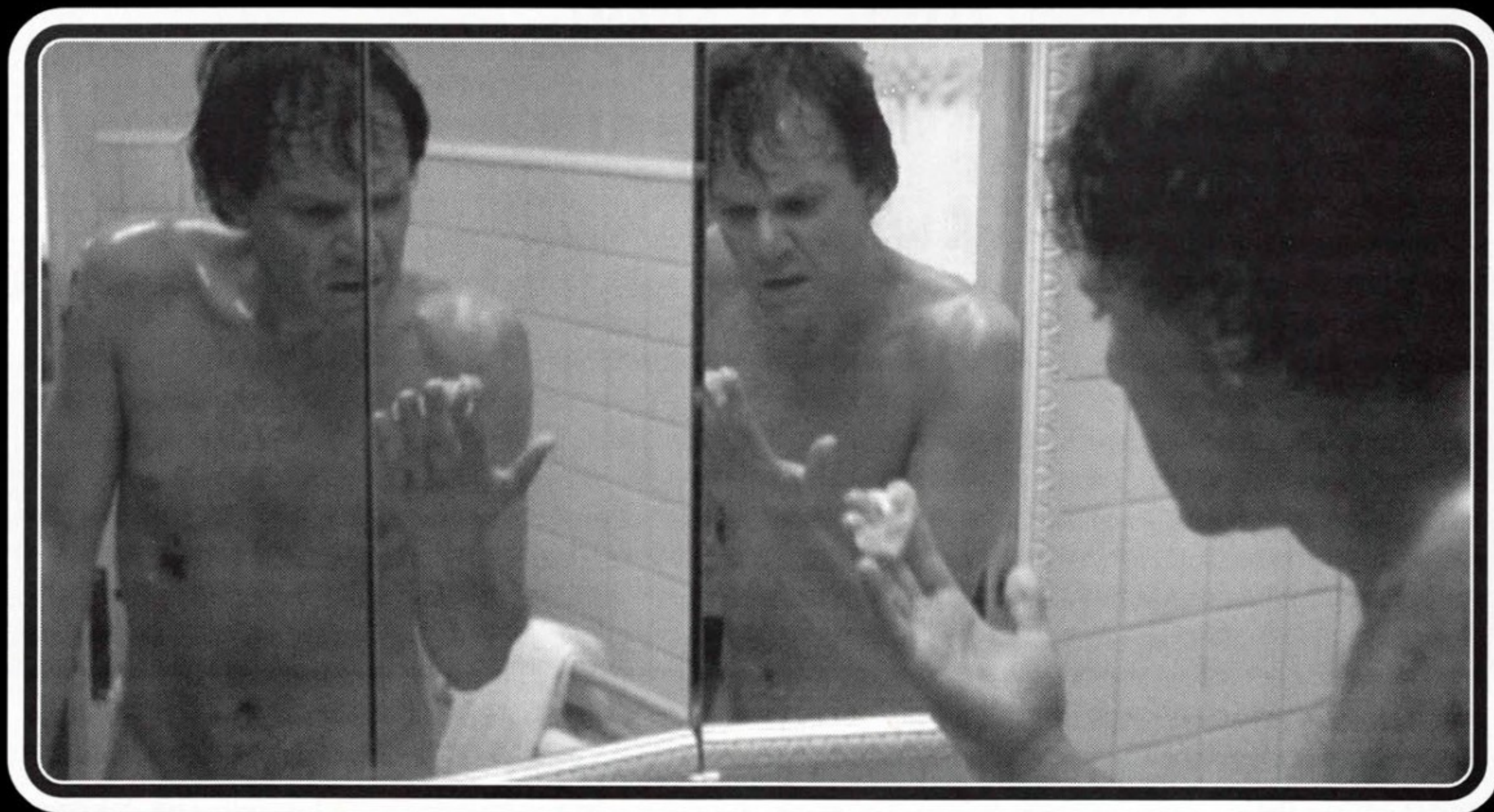
The 35mm negatives of UFO are reportedly faded and scratched but you would never know it from looking at this set, which presents the first 13 episodes on four dual layer discs. Aside from occasional mild grain during exteriors and some special effects shots (almost certainly intrinsic to the original photography), the image looks spotless. Hues are consistently gorgeous, from the day-glo Pop Art production design and costumes to the garish purple wigs sported by some of the female cast members. The mono sound is also robust (with Barry Gray's extremely catchy theme coming across quite well), though the digital clarity makes looped lines sound a bit exposed. On the downside, A&E still needs to work on their digital compression: pronounced artifacting is almost always visible in the moving blue sky background

of sequences involving miniatures. The crispness of the image also makes it a bit easier to detect the wires but, on the whole, Derek Meddings' model work holds up well and remains one of the program's prime attractions. Six chapters are provided for each episode and, as mentioned, they are presented in the approximate order of production, not broadcast.

Unfortunately, as with A&E's release of the first season of *SPACE: 1999* [reviewed VW 82:34], Region 1 customers are, once again, not getting all of the extras included on the Region 2 PAL release from Carlton Visual Entertainment. Why not? That attractive set includes a multitude of production photos, passages from now-lost deleted scenes (reconstructed with stills and script excerpts), and character profiles. A booklet and five postcards are also tucked inside the packaging. None of these are provided here and the US "Photo Gallery" consists of nothing more than video grabs from the programs! The American discs are also packaged in a flimsy, poorly designed case that is difficult to close. In all fairness to A&E, their set does boast one exclusive extra: tests for Mel Oxley, the actor who does the voice of Space Intruder Detector, an orbiting, fully computerized scanner.



DVDs



Malcolm McDowell discovers the tragic consequences of a hot date in Paul Schrader's confused remake of CAT PEOPLE.

CAT PEOPLE

1982, Universal Home Video, DD-2.0/MA/SS/16:9/LB/ST/CC/+, \$24.98, 117m 53s, DVD-1

By Rebecca & Sam Umland

CAT PEOPLE is only very loosely indebted to Val Lewton's 1942 horror film of the same title, although the credits aver that it is based on the screen story by DeWitt Bodeen, Lewton's favorite scenarist. It's true that both films feature shy female protagonists who live under the shadow of an ancient curse, but there are few other similarities. The premise for the original **CAT PEOPLE** is a strong one that figures prominently in the

horror film tradition: that of a human who is cursed by involuntarily transforming into a predatory animal. It is certainly the idea that lends the tragic dimension to **THE WOLF MAN** (1941) and its compelling, sympathetic protagonist; yet, as scripted by **DERANGED**'s Alan Ormsby and directed by Paul Schrader on the heels of his success with **AMERICAN GIGOLO** (1980), **CAT PEOPLE** is hardly a tragedy, nor is it erotic. Rather it is an utterly strange film about a race of human/feline hybrids that are apparently even more confused about how to deal with their sexuality than human beings, and whose attempts to

sublimate their animal urges lead to even more disastrous consequences than it does with most humans.

The film is about Paul Gallier (Malcolm McDowell) and his long-lost sister Irena (Nastassia Kinski, in the days when she was spelling her name with an "i" instead of a "j"), who were separated when their itinerant circus worker parents—though happily married—committed suicide. Aged four at the time of her parents' demise, Irena was raised in an orphanage while Paul, a few years older, somehow escaped this fate and eventually settled in New Orleans (whose French Quarter, with its dark, narrow,

and labyrinthine streets would seem to be a perfect setting for a horror film). Now years later, Irena joins Paul in New Orleans, where she plans to settle. Their happy reunion is cut short, however, when the curse of their mutual heritage is revealed. The Galliers are “cat people,” humans who morph into black leopards during the sexual act. Therefore, for them to have sex will prove fatal to their partner, unless said partner happens to be one of their own kind—thus compelling Paul and Irena to break the taboo of incest. Prior to Irena’s arrival, Paul has sustained his appetites on hookers and other women procured for him by his Jamaican housekeeper Female (Ruby Dee, her character’s name rhyming with “tamale”).

Upon her arrival, the frigid Irena seems to know nothing of her heritage—a fact that seems scarcely plausible, since she exercises a feline ability to leap effortlessly into the branches of trees, for instance—or, more likely, she is in some deep denial of this fact. When Paul, in leopard form, is captured and placed in the New Orleans Zoo, Irena—visiting the zoo as part of a city tour—is strangely drawn to the beast. To complicate matters, she meets and is attracted to the zoo’s curator, Oliver (John Heard), creating a double triangle consisting of herself, Oliver, and her would-be lover/brother, Paul, and between Oliver, herself, and Oliver’s assistant, Alice (Annette O’Toole), with whom Oliver is romantically involved. Once he escapes the zoo by killing one of its attendants (Ed Begley, Jr.), Paul confronts his sister with their shared curse, and urges upon her the fact that they can only mate with one another. He pleads with Irena to release him from his feline prison, to recognize what she

is, but she refuses, until it is too late for them to provide each other with mutual salvation.

CAT PEOPLE was financed by Universal at a time when the studio was remaking some RKO horror classics; John Carpenter’s remake of **THE THING** (also 1982) emerges from roughly the same period. The decision to remake **CAT PEOPLE** was not in itself an unwise one, but the film fails because of poor decisions in its script and casting. Nastassia Kinski is neither sympathetic nor credible as the shy, virginal Irena. Doubtless, she was cast in this part because of her more convincing performance as a character who retains a virginal innocence, despite the fact that she is an unwed mother and then a murderess, in Roman Polanski’s **TESS** (1979), released three years earlier. More importantly, the script fails to account for its premise by consistently violating its own internal logic: there are several inconsistencies, vague explanations, and seeming contradictions. For instance, the film opens with a short sequence involving an ancient ritual, in which a young girl is tied to a tree by her tribe, as a sacrifice to the leopards. Then, another girl is sent into the leopard’s lair, dressed like a vestal virgin (perhaps to mate?). At this point, the story jumps ahead to present day New Orleans. We only learn of the significance of the opening ritual when Paul later informs Irena that the ancient leopards had consumed so many sacrificial victims (vaguely reminiscent of the Sphinx) that they began to be possessed of human souls, thus creating the species of the “cat people.” As sketchy and implausible as this is, the viewer could accept it as a premise, a figure for the human soul trapped in an unwanted bestial

body, yet another instance of the body-soul dualism.

Unfortunately, many other daunting riddles remain unexplained. For instance, although we learn the origins of the cat people, we never learn why the incest factor is so important. Paul and Irena’s parents were also brother and sister; we might believe that Paul and Irena are forced into an incestuous liaison because they are the last of their kind. This theory is confounded, however, during a scene set in a bar when Irena is addressed by a strange woman dressed in furs (called the equivocal “Cat-like Woman” in the end credit scroll) who seemingly recognizes her, uttering, “*Mi hermana*” (“my sister”). If there are other cat people—certainly one implication of the utterance made by the mysterious woman in the bar—the incest theme becomes bogus, merely a contrived barrier: why can’t Paul mate with this other woman? For that matter, given that it comprises a small minority, wouldn’t any sexual union between the race of cat people be incestuous, and therefore meet the (dynastic) restriction? Another problem is how Irena can claim to be ignorant of her biological oddity: she can leap to tree-tops, hurdle the rail of a second-story balcony and land safely on the ground, and wanders outdoors at night, hunting and consuming small prey. This behavior is presumably explained by her growing sexual awareness, but in fact she is already sexually aware (though still a virgin) before we are introduced to her, candidly admitting to Alice that she once shied away from having sex with a man because she was intimidated by the size of his penis (the scene in which this admission occurs is an utter embarrassment, so we’ll skip the details). Thus Irena must be



Irena (Nastassia Kinski) rejects her brother's appeals for a more intimate relationship in CAT PEOPLE.

aware that what Paul tells her is true, yet she refuses to yield to his pleas: "I'm not like you" she insists, but her line makes sense in its context only if indeed she *does* know the truth.

Also, the principle by which the cat people morph between human and animal forms is equally inconsistent. Purportedly, Paul morphs into a leopard when he becomes sexually aroused by a woman, as established by the scene early in the film in the massage parlor. Unable to satisfy his sexual demands, he resorts to murder instead, consuming his prey (Lynn Lowry, formerly of **SHIVERS** and **I DRINK YOUR BLOOD**), giving him a kind of serial killer profile. According to the mythology presented in the film, he must then kill another human (as a sacrifice?) to regain his prior human form. Yet, in another sequence, Paul is shown in bed with a woman he picked

up (at a cemetery), during which he expresses hesitations about having sex with her because he likes her. She interprets this as nervousness, and begins to seduce him. After some intervening scenes, Paul is next shown awakening on the tiled floor of the bathroom—in human form—though a slow pan reveals the room in disarray and that the woman has been savagely murdered. So why hasn't he morphed into a leopard? At this point, one begins to suspect that such logical flaws are of little concern to the filmmakers, though there are a number of gratuitous nude scenes featuring the curiously androgynous Kinski (with whom the film's director admits, in his audio commentary, he was romantically involved while the film was being shot), presumably included to fill in the narrative gaps with a little T&A. Finally, we puzzle over why the

quirky Oliver, the zoo curator, continues his romantic pursuit of Irena, without hesitation, even after he has learned the grisly truth about Paul (by the evidence of human remains police have found in the basement of Paul's house) and about Irena herself.

Malcolm McDowell turns in a compelling performance as Paul, despite the fact that **CAT PEOPLE** fails to develop the tragic possibilities of his character. Paul recognizes that he is in "prison," a hell in which he is driven by primal urges beyond his control. He wishes to live peacefully among humans, but he needs the cooperation of his own species to do so (this problem among the human-wolf hybrid species, werewolves, was plausibly addressed in 1981's **THE HOWLING**). Unlike Irena, who denies her fate, Paul faces truthfully what he is, and tries to rise above it. Most moving is his

appreciation for the beauty around him, and his regret that he must kill that which he finds beautiful. Apparently, the director saw Irena, and not Paul, as the main protagonist—a mistake, as Paul is killed off in the third act, and the passionless relationship between Oliver and Irena is pursued instead. Irena's character demands little viewer sympathy, in part because of the confusion about what she knows and does not acknowledge about herself, but also because little of her character is explored until the film's final moments. This confusion may be related not only to weak character development, but also to some poor editing choices; there are gaps in the storyline that might well be explained by cut scenes, though the supplemental materials included on Universal's DVD fail to bear this theory out.

One would hope that Paul Schrader's audio commentary might sort all of this out, but it doesn't. One does get the impression, however, that he was trying to approach the tired "beast within" theme with a European art house approach, as he lavishes high praise on the film's late production designer Ferdinando Scarfiotti, who, according to certain comments Schrader makes, also functioned as its virtual co-director. (In the '70s, Scarfiotti designed several major productions for Bernardo Bertolucci, and also gave Schrader's **AMERICAN GIGOLO** its distinctive look.) "At the time, I had wanted to call this 'A Film by Paul Schrader and Ferdinando Scarfiotti,'" Schrader says, but union and/or studio restrictions prevented it. (We find the production design to be strongly influenced by the African and Middle Eastern settings

in John Boorman's **EXORCIST II: THE HERETIC** [1977], but no one, to our knowledge, has commented on this similarity.) He also rightly speculates as to whether the film, if made now, 20 years on, in a more conservative political climate, would be given an R rating, as there is considerable nudity (mostly of Nastassia Kinski, though Annette O'Toole—now Martha Kent on TV's **SMALLVILLE**—also takes her turn). This European art house approach might also explain the (mis)casting of Kinski, though, in a disingenuous moment, Schrader avers that she was one of the few actresses at the time who could convincingly portray a virgin.

In addition to Schrader's technical-leaning audio commentary, the disc contains other supplements as well, including the 25m 19s **CAT PEOPLE: AN INTIMATE PORTRAIT**, an interview with Schrader conducted in November 2000 that is actually more informative than his audio commentary. Again, Schrader praises the contributions of Scarfiotti to the look of the film; it was Scarfiotti, for instance, who created the film's opening title sequence, during which, over the opening credits, a desert wind slowly uncovers human skeletal remains from the sands in which they are buried. As noted earlier, we expected to see some footage of deleted scenes, but the only such footage included on the disc is minimal, and was cut from Irena's dream sequence. In this surreal sequence, Irena is greeted by her dead brother Paul who reveals to her the origins of the race of cat people and urges her to return to New Orleans (a puzzle, since in reality he is already dead when she has the dream). As Irena approaches the

huge gnarled tree in whose branches we saw leopards resting in the film's opening moments, Paul introduces Irena to her mother—played by Kinski's real, biological mother, whose body was outfitted with a spotted leopard costume. Schrader admits that test audiences heckled the shot, so it was modified by replacing her costumed mother with one of the black leopards instead. Schrader also reveals that, while initially drawn to the film because he wanted to recharge his creative batteries by directing a script written by someone else, the script—to his surprise—slowly began to reflect his own obsessions, and became a less formulaic horror film. He believed that the original script's ending was too predictable—Oliver kills the monster—and so replaced it with an unpredictable ending, in which the creature is allowed to live. The ending, as it now exists, Schrader calls "one of the more perverse endings in film" and consists of a bondage scene: Oliver lashes Irena's wrists and ankles to the bed before having sex with her, an act that will return her to leopard form so that she can dwell with her own kind—which makes no sense, either, because she is not a leopard, but a human-leopard hybrid, a "cat person." Schrader sees the concluding sex scene as containing "active zoophilia," which we interpret as meaning an act of bestiality, hence he would not be inclined to call it "perverse." (He fails to delve into the reasons for Oliver committing the act.) Such an interpretation contradicts other comments he makes about the film, however, in that he was interested in exploring sexual love as a displaced form of religious passion (the references

to Beatrice and Oliver's attempts to memorize portions of Dante's *La Vita Nuova*). In the terms of this reading, Oliver's sexual act with Irena at the conclusion is "perverse" because it conflates the sexual act with religious worship (pagan worship, perhaps, but worship nonetheless).

None of the supplements included on the disc help to un muddy the waters, so **CAT PEOPLE** will forever remain what it is, a strange, unclassifiable *mélange* of scenes and motifs. The DVD also includes a 10m 19s "On the Set" featurette that consists of what seems to be a portion of an interview with Schrader. His often evasive answers to his interlocutor's questions about the story only confirm our suspicions that the story is not clear to him (then or now). He insists that he's interested in making a film about the origins of a mythology, but **CAT PEOPLE** contains no coherent mythology. For instance, the most celebrated ancient culture that did routinely practice incest—albeit only among its ruling class, and clearly practiced in order to continue its dynastic reign—was Egyptian culture, yet the film's depiction of the origins of the race of cat people is obscure, vaguely Oriental (Middle Eastern) rather than Egyptian. Given that there is some evidence to support the claim that the Egyptians domesticated the cat thousands of years ago, such origins actually would have provided a convenient and more plausible premise for the film.

Other supplements explore the film's special make-up effects and Albert Whitlock's matte paintings (among the last he did for motion pictures). For no specified reason, there is 3m

snippet of remarks by Robert Wise about the genius of Val Lewton, with whom Wise worked in the 40s. Since the Ormsby/Schrader/Scarfiotti **CAT PEOPLE** has only loose, contingent connections to the Lewton original, including Wise's remarks on the disc seems a proverbial *non sequitur*. There is also an 11m 14s discussion with Tom Burman, who did the special make-up appliances for the feline transformations of McDowell and Kinski—back in the days before CGI when these morphing effects were new, introduced in films such as **THE HOWLING** and **AN AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON**, both released the year before **CAT PEOPLE**. (Such make-up appliances were also used at the time in John Carpenter's **THE THING**, revealing yet again how the current technology drives a film's content, and not the other way around.) Burman also discusses the various consistencies of stage blood (aka "Kensington Gore") used in the film, using as his demonstration the scene in which Ed Begley, Jr. makes his ill-advised request for Oliver to "bring the prod" and subsequently experiences an unhappy mitosis with his left arm. An interesting 3m 9s supplement demonstrates the placement of each of Albert Whitlock's matte paintings in the film. There is also a banal 6m 44s montage of promotional and production stills, and a wobbly transfer of the 2m 18s theatrical trailer.

As part of a licensing arrangement with Universal, Image Entertainment released **CAT PEOPLE** on DVD early in 1998 in a no-frills edition that we have not had the opportunity to review. We did, however, review our letterboxed edition of

the OOP MCA/Universal LD (#41779) from 1994. This edition contained a disclaimer on the back jacket that indicated some of the music had been re-scored. The 1998 DVD issue also contained the same disclaimer, so we assume the earlier DVD was struck from same source materials as the LD. The earlier LD replaced Ed Begley, Jr.'s 20s recitation of "What's New, Pussycat?" from the original theatrical version with 17s of alternative footage (shot at the time) consisting of his bowdlerized rendition of "The Lion Sleeps Tonight (Wimoweh)," and also replaced Perry Como's "Faraway Places" (RCA), used in the theatrical version, with Ella Fitzgerald's "Sunday Kind of Love" (MCA) as background music during the dinner held the night of Irena's arrival. Happily, Universal has included the original theatrical version on its new DVD, thus making the new issue a must for the film's enthusiasts.

The film is presented letterboxed at about 1.75:1 from its original 1.85:1, with 16:9 anamorphic playback. The transfer is a bit on the soft side, with poor contrasts. Blacks are generally solid and colors are acceptably saturated, but the transfer is frankly a disappointment. We expected the DVD re-release to have a remixed DD-5.1 soundtrack as well, but surprisingly, Universal has issued the disc with the original Dolby stereo tracks only. Chapter selections are listed on a (paper) slip in the keepcase, and the disc has been acceptably closed-captioned, with optional subtitles available in English, French, and Spanish.

CONFESSIONS OF A PSYCHO CAT

1968, *Something Weird Video*,
DD-1.0/+, \$24.95,
69m 11s, DVD-0

By Richard Harland Smith

A film ripping off **THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME**, **THE 10TH VICTIM** and **TEN LITTLE INDIANS** should be able to manage on its own, material-wise—but this New York-lensed cheapie resorts to softcore cutaways to pad out its less than 70m length. When a nervous breakdown prevents her from accompanying her brother on an African safari, rich bitch Virginia Marcus uses the opportunity to indulge her fantasies of playing public executioner for Manhattan's bottom feeders: a junkie responsible for

a young girl's overdose, a washed-up actor who razor-slashed his mistress's husband to his final curtain, and a wrestling champ who stomped his last opponent into the afterlife. Postdating personal checks to each of these "bona fide killers," Virginia promises the men a reward of \$100,000 if they can elude her on a hunt through the mean streets of Gotham for 24 hours. Dispatching the actor and the wrestler easily enough, Virginia focuses her crosshairs on the junkie, who survives a confrontation in Central Park to take refuge at an orgy. While safe indoors and among witnesses (however preoccupied), the user's addiction to "H" eventually pulls him back out onto the streets to score and meet his fate.

It's always a treat when low budget flicks, shot guerilla-style on the streets of Manhattan, provide a look at the structures of yesteryear, and **CONFESSIONS OF A PSYCHO CAT** offers some arresting views of Times Square (a cinema marquee trumpeting Paul Newman as **HARPER**) and Greenwich Village (The Sullivan Street Theater, where actor Ed Garrabrandt was a cast member of **THE FANTASTICKS!**, then in the third of its 30+-year run). Too often, however, **PSYCHO CAT**'s camera is framed too tightly to allow specific locales to be readily identifiable; while the street scenes have an invigorating zip, they could have been shot in any city. (The Central Park hunt is mostly a cheat, decamping quickly to some upstate lake with

*Jake La Motta, the original RAGING BULL,
meets a bad end in the exploitation potboiler CONFESSIONS OF A PSYCHO CAT.*



cottages visible on the far shore.) The actors give it their all, particularly Eileen Lord as the huntress and former boxing champ Jake La Motta (the inspiration for Martin Scorsese's **RAGING BULL** is taken down, matador-style, to the accompaniment of Mexicali brass), but this is not to say that either performance is particularly good. The orgy scenes are indifferently acted, incompetently shot and poorly integrated even among themselves. Taking a cue from Shirley Clarke's dope drama **THE CONNECTION** (1962), these vignettes are tied in by having the revelers awaiting a supply of skag from the imperiled Buddy Boy (Frank Geraci, performing as "Frank Grace"), who relates events of the story he could not have possibly witnessed.

The true pedigree of the crazy-quilt **CONFESSIONS OF A PSYCHO CAT** is a bone of contention for exploitation historians, with one theory being that the project was filmed as a straight-ahead shocker, to which the (tame) sexual situations were added later. (The American Film Institute's 1961-70 catalogue confesses outright ignorance, suggesting that the story has something to do with "a schizophrenic sensualist" and that it includes scenes of "troilism, lesbianism, sadism and oral and anal intercourse.") It was distributed by Chancellor Films, opening stateside in February 1968 before playing abroad. Reportedly, the film underwent a title change to **THE THREE LOVES OF A PSYCHO CAT**, with an ad campaign making more of a to-do about the participation of Jake La Motta (unbilled in the original run). Something Weird's standard transfer—which crops

well in zoomed 16:9 playback—is another winner, sharp and eye-catching in all its monochrome lustre. The mono sound is variable but adequate and the film has been encoded with 8 chapters.

Not listed as a co-feature, but included as a bonus, is Dale Berry's **HOT BLOODED WOMAN** (1965, 68m), starring Beverly Oliver as Myrtle Penny-packer, a "pathetic, loveless, miserably sick" young woman compelled to undress in front of men. When a hobo (Larry Buchanan regular Bill Thurman) attempts to rape Myrtle alongside a stretch of rural railway, the woman's harried husband drags her to a psychiatrist, who hypnotizes the "poor unfortunate" into relating her tale of woe. Although it seems a chump's game to criticize a film made expressly to exploit such taboo subjects as mental illness and sexual dysfunction, **HOT BLOODED WOMAN** is misogynistic trash that will stick in the craw of anyone not immediately predisposed towards post-synched sleaze. Even when Myrtle busts out of a sanitarium and brandishes a revolver to plug anyone who gets in her way, the film is dead set against her. The standard transfer of this B&W feature is taken from a scratched and stained source (to which Something Weird have affixed their proprietary logo), but is certainly watchable. This film has also been encoded with 8 chapters.

Even when their featured films leave something to be desired, Something Weird loads each of their DVDs with enough extras to make the experience feel like crashing the neighborhood's coolest party. Also included in this

"Special Edition" package is the short subject **PREFACE TO LIFE** (28m 43), made by Sun Dial Films for the National Institute of Mental Health. Concerned with the mental development of the hypothetical "Michael F. Thompson" (played as a young adult by a pre-stardom Don Murray), the short is disarmingly sincere in its warning of the damage that can be wrought on children by the often selfish designs of their well-meaning parents. This cautionary tale depicts (**IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE**-style) the consequences of Michael surrendering his will to either his father's *macho* bullying (which turns him into a drunken failure) or his mother's coddling (which tips the lad towards, it is implied, chain smoking and latent homosexuality). **PREFACE OF LIFE** is in good shape, if not nearly as sharp as this disc's main attraction, and the sound is somewhat soft.

The lineup of extras is fleshed out with 10 trailers, including saucy peeks at Joe Sarno's **COME RIDE THE PINK HORSE** (2m 57s), **BAD GIRLS DON'T CRY** (1m 13s, starring Elsa Martinelli), Armando Bo's Eastmancolor nympho-drama **FUEGO** (2m 47s) and the Greek import **STEFANIA** (2m 39s). SWV's "Gallery of Sexploitation Art" (10m 17s) is distinguished by posters for a number of Joe Sarno films (**SIN IN THE SUBURBS**, **THE LOVE MERCHANT**, **MY BODY HUNGERS** and **DADDY DARLING**), along with an intriguing press release heralding that J.E.R. Pictures "is on the way" with their release of such must-see films as **THE CURIOUS DR. HUMPP**, **THE HOT MONTH OF AUGUST** and Andy Milligan's most unsexy **THE GHASTLY ONES**.



Henry Limpet (Don Knotts) has a wish, a wish to be a fish in Arthur Lubin's THE INCREDIBLE MR. LIMPET.

THE INCREDIBLE MR. LIMPET

1964, Warner Home Video, DD-2.0/MA/16:9/ST/CC/+, \$24.98, 99m, DVD-1

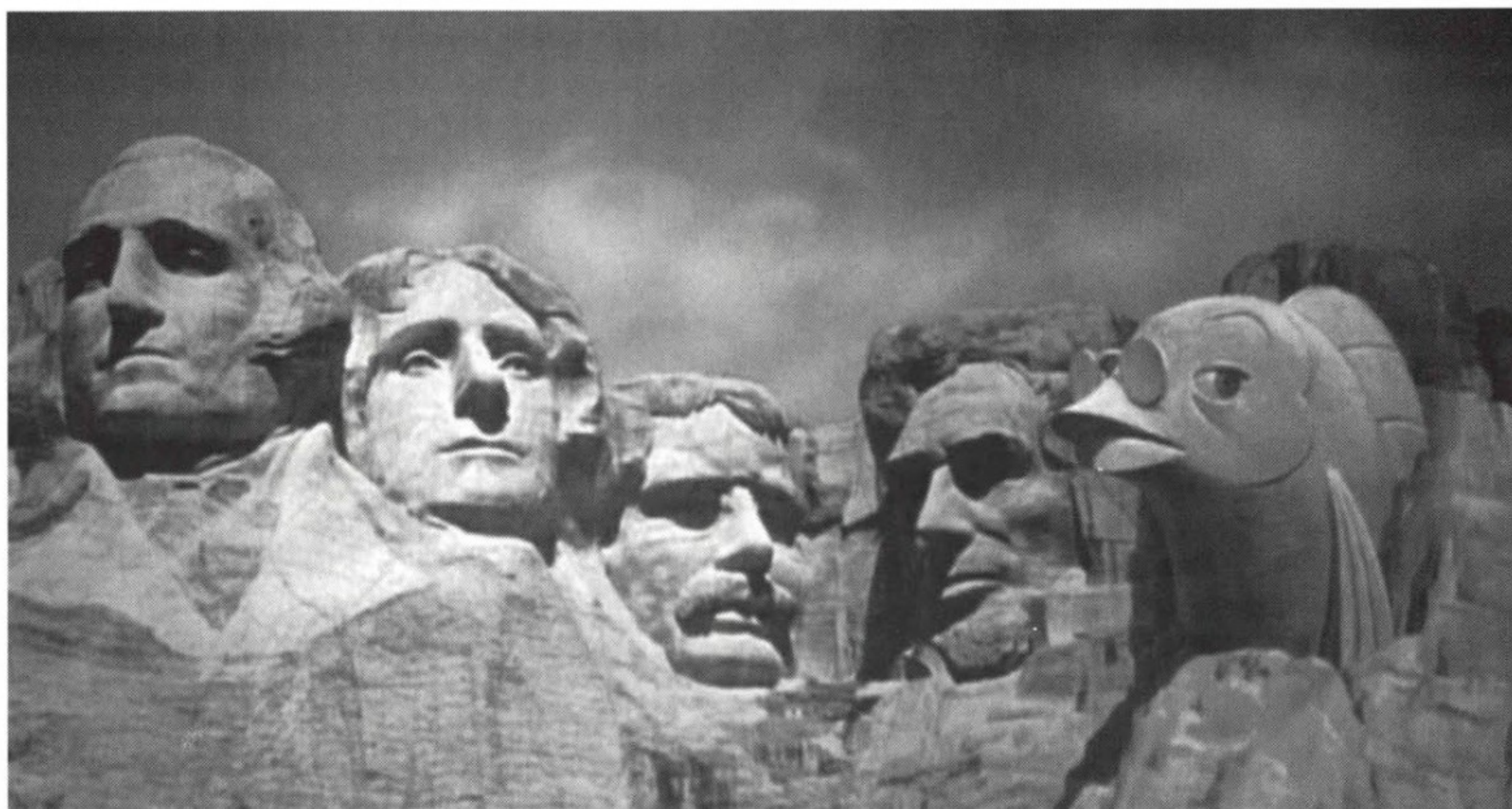
By Charlie Largent

Incompetence and cowardice, plus a fanatical desire to conceal those flaws at any price: this was the Deputy Sheriff of Mayberry, Barney Fife... a pillar of flopsweat. The actor who portrayed him, Don Knotts, was in complete control of all his nervous tics, his shaky bravado was as finely tuned as Oliver's fastidious slowburn or Stanley's mewling crying jags. Knotts' movie career would never match his television success, but no matter; his talent, though large, was best experienced small. The TV screen was an ideal frame for this brilliantly compact portrayal of the Incredibly Shrunken Man. It was Barney's small stature, combined with his insecurities, that endeared him so to children,

so it might have been upsetting for these young fans to see their hero so shamefully compromised in **THE INCREDIBLE MR. LIMPET**. Equal parts live action and animation, this is a Saturday matinee programmed by Krafft-Ebing, a disturbing chowder of impotence, adultery and singing clams. **THE INCREDIBLE MR. LIMPET**, with its sordid title pun, serves up Barney Fife's dirty laundry for all the gossips of Mayberry to savor.

Directed by Arthur Lubin—who once presided over the adventures of another Don (Donald O'Connor) and a talking mule named Francis—Knotts plays Henry Limpet, a puny factotum who works in an airless office and, at home, merely exists with his wife, Bessie (Carole Cook). Their relationship is so asexual, it feels like a marriage of convenience (she could be taken for his mother). To add to the already strained atmosphere Bessie has entered into an

uncomfortably open affair with George Stickel ("Not Pickle... Stickel!"), an old friend of Henry's (he's played by that leering, blob-like, anti-sex-symbol Jack Weston, adding an extra layer of humiliation for poor Henry). Henry doesn't object to his wife's infidelity; he can't bring himself to care. Bessie offers her cheek to kiss and Henry becomes, literally, seasick; his real passion is directed underwater, where he can find happiness in de-evolution. Limpet dreams of turning back Darwin's clock to a prehistoric moment when there was no emotion attached to sex: he wants to be a fish. Henry has saltwater in his veins along with a complaint common to so many transsexuals: he's a tuna trapped in a man's body. One afternoon, while picnicking with Bessie and third-wheel Stickel, Henry gets his wish: simply by falling off a pier, he is transformed into a cartoon trout and, during this very long animated segment, he



When Henry Limpet becomes a Nazi-fighting fish, his fame scales incredible heights—as in this Mt. Rushmore panorama by animator Vladimir Tytla.

finds his courage and redemption. At the heart of this waterlogged fairy tale is a sad triangle; with its blowsy, cheating wife, milquetoast husband and animated crabs, **THE INCREDIBLE MR. LIMPET** is like a Saturday morning cartoon version of **WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF**. Certainly, the film is a cheat as children's entertainment; along with the egregious songs on the soundtrack ("I wish/I wish/I wish I were a fish..."), the animated section has no joy in it. These cartoon sequences are so pedestrian in their conception—the Henry-fish battles Nazis and wins the sexiest fillet in the ocean (voiced by Elizabeth MacRae, who, in an ANDY GRIFFITH spin-off series, would later romance Gomer Pyle in the role of Lou-Anne Poovie)—they could have been dreamed up by a sad paper-pusher just like Limpet. The colors are stuck in the near monochromatic blue of the sea, and even that blue is not a bright Disney hue, but a dim, muddy pastel. Though the film

keeps telling us we should be happy for his watery fate, Henry's morose spirit prevails; in every sense, Limpet remains true to his name.

Warner's DVD of **THE INCREDIBLE MR. LIMPET** is a strikingly beautiful presentation. The digital transfer (for better and worse) puts the gross, overlit TV lighting of the live action sequences under a microscope and magnifies them with crystal clarity, so that the unbelievable happens: they are now more attractive and interesting than the animation. There is one outstanding scene where Henry peers into an aquarium and dreams; it's lit with the lurid colors of an Esther Williams underwater ballet. The color in the animation sequences is dull and muted, but seems to convey every bit of detail and hue the animators intended: from stem to stern, this transfer is as clear as sparkling water. The two-sided disc offers both standard and 16:9 widescreen (1.78:1) transfers; the anamorphic version is

sure to be the favorite, but the standard side gives you all that and more, by unmatting the frame. English and Spanish options are included, along with subtitles in those languages and French.

The disc is packed with several thoughtful additions: an introduction by Don Knotts, a couple of games for the kids (we started to play one, and then realized, "Hey, this is work!"), four more DVD-ROM-only games and, of greatest interest, two promotional pieces produced in January 1964. An uproarious trailer hosted by "the old red-head," Arthur Godfrey, functions as a plug for the movie and Godfrey's stuffy-nosed recording of one of the songs. **WEEKEND AT WEEKI WACHEE** is a 10m puff piece—just the thing that Something Weird Video would have dug up, had this title been on their watch—chronicling a Florida press junket where TV and movie journalists were wined, dined, allowed to hob-nob with the Knottster, and made to

attend the World Premiere of **LIMPET... underwater**. This short film is an aching reminder of the final moments of the crew cuts, striped T-shirts and horn-rimmed glasses of the late '50s and early '60s... The Beatles would appear on Sullivan just a few days later and the world we see here would be gone forever. These extras look extraordinary, sharp as a tack and with all of the juicy colors of a Floridian mermaid in full bloom, the *ne plus ultra* of our parent's vacation slides.

THE MAN WHO WASN'T THERE

2001, USA Home Entertainment, DD-5.1/MA/16:9/LB/CC/+, \$26.98, 115m 45s, DVD-1
Reviewed by Kim Newman

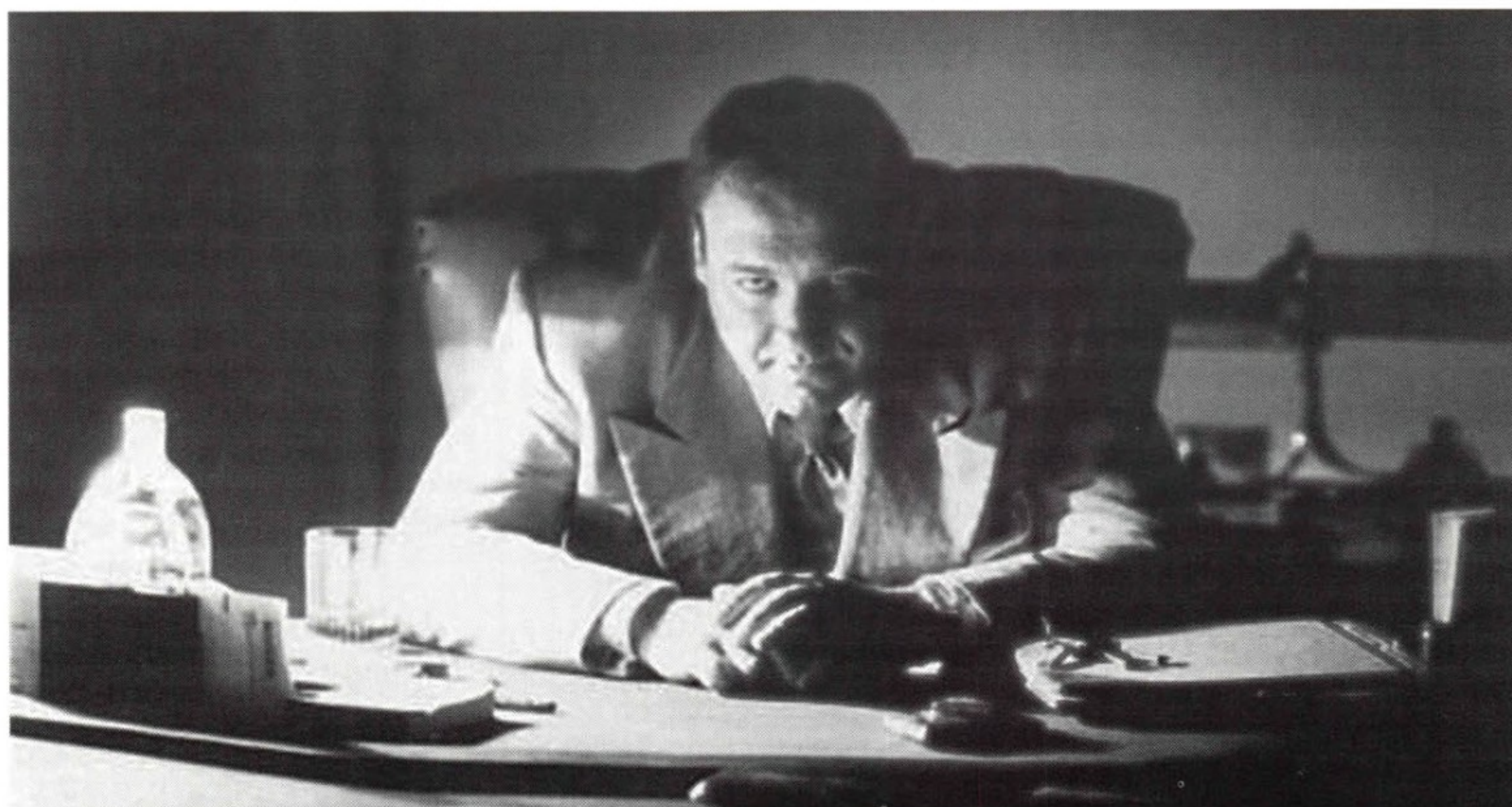
Director/co-writer Joel and producer/co-writer Ethan Coen continue to riff on the styles of 20th Century American crime writers, here following Hammett

(**MILLER'S CROSSING**) and Chandler (**THE BIG LEBOWSKI**) variations by returning to the themes of the man whose nasty little tales of domestic homicide inspired their debut **BLOOD SIMPLE**, James M. Cain. The rigor of the Coen devotion to sources is indicated by naming a department store in the film "Nirdlinger's," indicating an intention to go back to the books rather than films made from them (Phyllis Dietrichsen, the Barbara Stanwyck schemer of **DOUBLE INDEMNITY** was Phyllis Nirdlinger in Cain's novel). Film adaptations of **DOUBLE INDEMNITY** and **THE POSTMAN ALWAYS RINGS TWICE** streamline Cain's distinctive third acts, which seem like left-field sequels to the heart of the story; this dramatizes the very Cain-like collapse of the hero after all his problems seem solved, with ironies unnoticed earlier spinning round to trap him and legal/romantic angels appearing to take

him on rides which lead only to the there where he wasn't.

After the increasing popular acceptance of comparatively warm films like **FARGO**, **THE BIG LEBOWSKI** and **O BROTHER WHERE ART THOU?**, the Coens here adopt a very chilly tone, with a stark B&W look and a remote eponymous character. Ed Gale (Billy Bob Thornton) is a barber in the California small town of Santa Rosa (incidentally, the setting of Hitchcock's **SHADOW OF A DOUBT**) in 1949. Ed's interior monologue (a **KIND HEARTS AND CORONETS**-style memoir written for a lurid men's magazine) compensates for an unbarberly reticence in actual speaking as his partner/brother-in-law (Michael Badalucco) spiels a mile a minute, and provides a philosophical prose voice-over as he reflects on momentous incidents in which, as indicated by the title, he seems barely to have been present. Tempted by an opportunity to buy into

James Gandolfini, on hiatus from THE SOPRANOS, lends weighty menace to Big Dave Brewster in the Coen Brothers' B&W noir, THE MAN WHO WASN'T THERE.



a dry-cleaning franchise with toupéed “pansy” Creighton Tolliver (Jon Polito), Ed sets out to blackmail Big Dave Brewster (James Gandolfini), the bluff, blowhard who is having an affair with his vivacious, hard-boiled wife Doris (Frances McDormand). When it all blows up, Ed stabs Big Dave in self-defence and a pair of embarrassed cops show up at the barber shop to tell him Doris, implicated with the dead man in embezzlement to pony-up the blackmail money, has been arrested for murder. With super-lawyer Freddy Reidenschneider (**THIRTEEN GHOSTS**’ Tony Shalhoub) expensively on the case, Ed tries several times to confess, but Reidenschneider goes for another approach in court, inspired by Werner Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle (!) but thwarted by his client’s extreme actions on the eve of the trial.

Meanwhile, Ed becomes strangely interested in teenage pianist Birdy Abundas (**EIGHT-LEGGED FREAKS**’ Scarlett Johansson). Like the name Reidenschneider (the Sam Jaffe character in **THE ASPHALT JUNGLE**), this strand seems to come from W.R. Burnett, referencing Roy Earle’s patronage of the crippled teenager in **HIGH SIERRA** (Humphrey Bogart and Joan Leslie in the film). The third act becomes more dreamlike: with Ed accepting the traps into which circumstances lock him but dreaming of past or possible idylls, even drawn towards the perhaps-dreamed presence of flying saucers. In most Coen films, a significant object is invested with life by the wind or a casual toss; previously, it has been a hat, a hula-hoop, a tumbleweed, a bowling ball or a tin of pomade—here, a spinning hubcap-cum-flying-saucer sails

magically through the air after a farcical car accident, intimating a world beyond that apprehended by the ground-crawling, money-grubbing principles. Surrounded by motor-mouths, Ed Gale (a plain name to set beside many weird ones) keeps to himself, almost like a Jim Thompson sociopath, only slightly discontented with his half-life, sometimes distracted by tiny details or odd crusades, trying seriously to get the dead’s side of the story by visiting a medium but disappointed that the woman is an obvious phony, uncommitted to any of his ambitions and unresentful of the worst fate deals him.

THE MAN WHO WASN’T THERE is a deliberately distancing, off-putting film—slow paced for a thriller and shot through with absurd touches, with a protagonist who refuses to take part in the story he is narrating or make any moral judgment at all, even on people who have done him enormous wrongs. Nevertheless, it seems richer with repeat viewings, imbued with the genuine, against-the-odds sympathy the Coens always manage for their more doomed protagonists. The Coens’ trademark wry dialogue is present, with a literary love for the odd everyday turn of phrase, and the whole cast fit in perfectly with the style; there are micro-bits for Alan Fudge (**BUG**), Lilyan Chauvin (**SILENT NIGHT, DEADLY NIGHT**), Richard Jenkins (**SIX FEET UNDER**), Brooke Smith (**SERIES 7: THE CONTENDERS**) and Christopher McDonald (**THE HEARSE**). Regular Coen collaborator Roger Deakins contributes *noir* cinematography in the classic John Alton manner, shooting on color stock but printing in incredibly rich monotone, emphasizing not

only the look of 1949 movies but the subtle detail-work of the actors (Deakins sometimes lights Thornton’s eyes so the whites seem to glow like polished egg-shell). A representative scene of a film which is always beautiful and strange is a jailhouse chat between the seated Ed and the standing Reidenschneider in a smoky room with the brightest white light and deepest black shadow imaginable. As he talks, Reidenschneider stands in a column of angelic light, his face Batman-cowled by shadow.

USA Home Entertainment’s DVD is in gorgeous 16:9 wide-screen, encoded with 14 chapter stops, and offers English or French soundtracks, with optional French and Spanish subtitles or English captioning. It’s as perfect a B&W transfer as we’ve seen, with only tiny *moiré* effects on the *film noir* blinds and the odd textured jacket, and the 5.1 track wonderfully serves Thornton’s voice-over and a melancholy score, which mixed Beethoven sonatas with Carter Burwell compositions. Extras include: EPK interviews with the actors (in color, with the art direction glimpsed in the background) and video footage of Joel Coen at work on the set (in B&W); a 46m unedited chat with Deakins that ranges widely and deservedly highlights a team-member playing at the top of his game; a trailer and TV spots; behind-the-scenes photo gallery; filmographies; and deleted scenes—Reidenschneider’s opening argument, double-talk about “modern man” impressively delivered by a dapper Shalhoub (Thornton narrates over it in the film) and brief snippets of hairstyles and Doris’s “lovely salad.”

A major plus, after the tease of the **BLOOD SIMPLE**



Joan Weldon ventures into a sandstorm that's no picnic in the classic sf-horror film *THEM!*

joke commentary, is the first genuine Coen Brothers DVD commentary track, with Billy Bob Thornton usefully in the room to prevent the Coens from lapsing into the half-telepathic private language they use in shared interviews. This is all you can ask for in a commentary: tentative thematic analysis but nothing definitive, solid background information (one bit-player is dubbed by Jennifer Jason Leigh), wry humor about the project and the main character (they note instances of "the Ed nod"), amusing exchanges (Thornton: "I love the dialogue you guys wrote for the movie"; Ethan: "none of it for you"), pointed but unexpected footnotes about influences (the Coens cite "high-school hygiene movies" and make a pun about "driver's Ed films"), appreciations of the

actors (the Coens cite Jenkins as the player who most epitomizes the film's blank humor) and descriptions of scenes that didn't get beyond the outline (an invasion by ant-people). Another special edition of the film is also available that will be of interest to fans. The South Korean label Media Chain has issued a 3-disc NTSC version which includes the commentary, the Deakins interview, a 15m "Making Of," a 49m documentary called "THE FILM NOIR UNIVERSE," a photo gallery, filmographies (presumably bilingual), and the US trailer. Most notably, Disc 3 offers the color version of the movie, which was undertaken at the insistence of the film's Asian investors. On the downside, transfers are 4:3 letterbox, not 16:9, and the set is coded for Region 3 only.

THEM!

1954, Warner Home Video, DD-2.0/ST/CC/+, \$19.98, 92m 20s, DVD-1

By Gary L. Prange

*"Don't tread on an ant—
he's done nothing to you.
There may come a day
when he's treading on you.
Don't tread on an ant,
you'll end up back and blue.
Cut off his head,
legs come looking for you."
—adam ant ("Antmusic")*

The plot points would become clichéd by the end of the decade, but for audiences in 1954, **THEM!** was something new. It was Hollywood's first giant bug movie and arguably the best of the nature-goes-nuclear sci-fi threats made in the 1950s. A fine cast, smart script (by Ted Sherdeman, based on a George

Worthing Yates treatment) and good direction (Gordon Douglas) not only lifted **THEM!** above the giant insect movies that followed, it was Warner Bros.' biggest moneymaker of 1954.

Mutated into 12 foot-long monsters by atomic test explosions, several giant ants migrate from their destroyed desert nest to the storm drains of Los Angeles. They establish a new colony beneath the city and threaten citizens, children, heroic state trooper James Whitmore and tommygun-toting G-man James Arness (wearing a somewhat too-small helmet). The well-crafted ants are perhaps a little less than convincing, due mostly to their limited mobility, but they're plenty detailed, plenty big, plenty nasty and plenty cool. Ant builder Dick Smith's full-size creations may not convince, but they win over even the most jaded big-bug fan (this Dick Smith should not to be confused with the master makeup artist best known for his demonic child-monster from **THE EXORCIST**). Venerable character actor Edmund Gwenn plays Dr. Harold Medford, an elderly, lovable, yet slightly befuddled scientist who never lets his awe of runaway nature get in the way of the realization that the ample arthropods must be hunted down and destroyed. His daughter Pat (Joan Weldon) is also a scientist and provides the six-legged critters with two-legged competition for the attention of FBI agent Bob Graham (Arness). Fess Parker and Leonard Nimoy each make a brief appearance.

THEM! contains several haunting and timeless images and sequences: the little Ellison girl (Sandy Descher) wandering in shock through the desert; her startling scream when the smell of formic acid jolts her out of her

catatonia; a giant ant tossing a human rib cage down the side of the anthill into a pile of bones; and good-guy Whitmore being crushed between vice-like mandibles. But the element that resonates most isn't an image, but the eerie, high-pitched, quavering sound made by the ants. Soundman Francis J. Scheid's ant-music is quintessentially insectile. (Could anyone who saw **THEM!** even once not recognize that sound decades later?) That unique sound is also partly responsible for the heavy dose of suspense injected into the film by director Gordon Douglas. Early on, the desert isolation and moaning winds punctuated by the ant chorus create a mood of nervous anticipation—anticipation easily satisfied by the first appearance of one of the colossal critters.

It is very possible that **THEM!** is an allegorical tale with Cold War themes about political subversion and the ultimate threat to mankind being man himself. But the truth of the movie's appeal may actually have more to do with the link between army guys roasting giant atomic ants with flame-throwers and little boys doing the same to the sidewalk variety with a magnifying glass under the hot summer sun.

Warner's DVD offers a crisp, full-screen, B&W transfer with a full spectrum of grays and deep blacks. The DVD also restores the bold, attention-seizing, crimson-and-blue title superimposed over the B&W desert landscape as seen in the original theatrical release. The menu screen replicates the front page of a tabloid newspaper, complete with lurid headlines detailing the battle against the mutant ants. Menu options are embedded within some of the headlines. Navigation is initially confusing, but once the gist of the design is

grasped, getting around the menu comes easy enough. Supplemental materials are generous, including a trailer, behind-the-scenes archive footage, photo gallery, cast list and (basic) overview of other man-vs-insect movies. Subtitles are offered in English, French, Spanish, Portuguese and Japanese. The adhesive Warner uses on its security strips is more challenging than it needs to be: when we opened our copy, a stamp-sized portion of the box art came off with the strip.

TO THE DEVIL A DAUGHTER

1976, Anchor Bay Entertainment,
DD-1.0/16:9/LB/+, \$19.98,
92m 34s, DVD-1
By Kim Newman

One of the most hashed-over non-events in occult history was Aleister Crowley's project to bring the Devil's offspring to Earth, which he channelled into fiction in *MOONCHILD* (1929). This incident also inspired three other novels, all of which have been filmed: W. Somerset Maugham's *THE MAGICIAN* (1908, filmed by Rex Ingram in 1926), Ira Levin's *ROSEMARY'S BABY* (1967, filmed by Roman Polanski in 1968), and Dennis Wheatley's *TO THE DEVIL A DAUGHTER* (1953), filmed by Peter Sykes for Hammer in 1976. Coming very late to the material, the latter film—a long-in-development follow-up to the studio's success with the Wheatley-derived **THE DEVIL RIDES OUT** (aka **THE DEVIL'S BRIDE**, 1968)—is at once a last hurrah for Hammer's run of theatrical horrors and a middling entry in the demon possession movie cycle of the mid-1970s. Though not as troubled a production as Hammer's **BLOOD FROM THE MUMMY'S TOMB**

[1971, reviewed VW 79:36], with which it shares screenwriter Christopher Wicking, **TO THE DEVIL A DAUGHTER** does tend to be remembered for its “difficult” leading man (Richard Widmark) and flat ending. Christopher Lee, in his last work for the company, represents the thread of traditional horror Hammer had been following since **THE CURSE OF FRANKENSTEIN** but the film doesn’t look or feel much like any other Hammer horror—with its contemporary setting, German co-production locations, **IT’S ALIVE**-style demon baby and rather weary approach to the struggle between Good and Evil.

Abandoning most of Wheatley’s stuffy book, the film opens with the excommunication of Father Michael Rayner (Lee), who devotes himself to the worship of Astaroth. Rayner plots to create a vessel for his

master on Earth via an unwieldy scheme which involves having the daughter of a cultist baptized at birth in the blood of her own mother, and on her 18th birthday with the blood of a monster baby incarnation of the demon. Most Wicking scripts are elliptical, but this one—reworked by several credited and uncredited hands—is downright perverse. Early on, Henry Beddows (Denholm Elliott), neurotic father of the to-be-possessed novice Catherine (Nastassja Kinski), crashes a book launch party to enlist occult author John Verney (Widmark) as the girl’s temporary guardian and to tell him about the Astaroth cult ensnaring them. We get a big build-up to this meeting, with some comedy business about the launch party and Verney’s agent (Honor Blackman) and her gallery-owner boyfriend (**TOWER OF EVIL**’s Anthony

Valentine). Beddows and Verney have the crucial plot-establishing conversation out of our earshot, while secondary characters (who are only in the film to be last-reel victims) catch up on their cutesy gossip in the foreground. Several times, these odd little sidelights intrude as important plot and/or character scenes are withheld, most notoriously at the finish when everything is wrapped up with absurd ease as Verney defeats the Devil by smoting the bad priest’s head with a well-tossed rock. There isn’t even the *de rigueur*-for-the-’70s last minute stare to camera that indicates the innocent might be possessed after all.

Nevertheless, the film isn’t without interest. It may be less satisfying than other Wicking or Sykes efforts, at least partly because Widmark’s refusal to make Verney a conflicted and

Worshippers of Astaroth prepare a woman to act as a portal for Satan in Hammer’s horrific swan song, TO THE DEVIL A DAUGHTER.



possibly corrupted figure (as scripted lines sometimes suggest) turns it away from the questioning, uncomfortable revisionism of **DEMONS OF THE MIND** or **BLOOD FROM THE MUMMY'S TOMB** to reassert the square morality of Wheatley, who always insists Satanism and sexuality are wicked while pruriently gloating over "obscene" rites. However, there are subtly creepy or relishably melodramatic things going on between Lee (who has a wonderful fiendish grin at the end of a pan across horrified and/or disgusted faces), the prominently-billed Kinski (though she suffers the fate of many a Hammer starlet and is dubbed by a grown-up doing a squeaky "foreign" accent) and a close-to-cracking Elliott. Sykes and cinematographer David Watkin (whose credits range aptly from **THE DEVILS** to **JESUS OF NAZARETH**) make something of wide-angle views of tourist London or German lakes. Even the bungled climax is memorable for a Rollinesque moment as the habit comes off for Kinski's probably illegal nude scene (she claims 1961 as her date of birth, though even the more often listed 1959 would make her underage at the time of production) and an indication of otherworldly influence through color filtering that makes the world inside the magic circle considerably stranger. A scene in which Catherine presses the demon baby into her womb may be the most gruesome and transgressive in the Hammer canon (the creature's bloody condom tongue is especially disturbing), though its narrative status is unsure: it may be a rejected sequence pressed into

service as a dream to punch up the lackluster finish.

Anchor Bay's DVD presents the film in optimum condition: a pristine anamorphic 1.65:1 transfer (so you can appreciate the understated distortion effects), a Dolby Digital mono soundtrack that punches up Paul Glass's avant-garde score as it exposes some weak performances, 24 chapter-stops, and all the snippets usually trimmed for TV or video restored. The extras are a trailer (which invokes **ROSEMARY'S BABY** and **THE EXORCIST** but gets wrong release dates for both films), an extensive poster and stills gallery, bios for Lee and Widmark (but no one else) and a retrospective "making-of" featurette, **TO THE DEVIL... THE DEATH OF HAMMER** (24m). There is no commentary track, perhaps because prospective participants found it too painful to watch the film again, but the documentary covers all the ground, with input from Lee, Sykes, Wicking, Blackman, Valentine, producer Roy Skeggs, uncredited writer Gerald Vaughn-Hughes and fan experts Jonathan Sothcott and Marcus Hearn. Blue Underground should reconsider their policy of spooking up talking heads with weird lighting, but regardless, this is a first-rate job of contextualizing, with amusing byplay between interviewees recorded separately (Wicking: "Now I can ask Peter why he did that!"). A somewhat hidden feature is an extract from a camcorder interview (moderated by an unseen Stephen Laws) with longtime Hammer stuntman Eddie Powell, who reminisces about being set on fire for Valentine and doing a nude sex scene for Lee.

Imports

DARK WATER

Honogurai mizu no soko kara
2002, WideSight Entertainment
Ltd. #505348, DD-5.1/DTS-6.1/
16:9/LB/ST, \$15.99,
100m 59s, DVD-3
By Bill Cooke

With **RING** (*Ringu*, 1998), director Hideo Nakata accomplished no small feat: he scared the bejeezus out of today's jaded moviegoers and launched a new generation of imitators. While it's unlikely that his latest horror film **DARK WATER** will inspire the same kind of craze (sadly, many will see it as more of the same), it is a more visually assured and deeply affecting work, and should solidify Nakata's reputation as Japan's modern master of *kaidan eiga* ("ghost story" films).

Recently divorced, Yoshimi Matsubara (Hitomi Kuroki) finds herself scrutinized by lawyers when her ex-husband seeks custody of their five-year-old daughter Ikuko (Rio Kanno). Accused of being mentally unfit, the woman admits to once suffering from depression after proof-reading a string of graphically violent novels; however, yellow-hued flashbacks tell us that her disturbance goes back much farther—to the time in her childhood when she was neglected by her divorcing parents. With the law tenuously on her side, Yoshimi is allowed to keep her daughter (for a trial period, anyway), and after a long day of apartment hunting, the two end up at an old high-rise in a poor section of the city. The building is dark, dank and dingy, and there are puddles in the elevator and



Hitomi Kiroki stars as a divorcee whose run-down dwelling may be conveying messages from Beyond in DARK WATER, Hideo Nakata's chilling follow-up to RING.

halls, but being unemployed, Yoshimi can't afford anything better.

Soon after moving in, Ikuko draws her mother's attention to an ugly water stain on their ceiling, which grows larger each day. The apartment superintendent is informed, but apparently in no hurry to fix it. As the days pass, Yoshimi catches fleeting glimpses of a small figure in a yellow raincoat wandering the halls and hears the pitter-patter of little feet coming through her ceiling, even though the flat above them is supposedly unoccupied. Worst of all, a child's red purse keeps popping up in unexpected places no matter how many times it is thrown away. Thinking that her ex-husband is playing cruel jokes to break her down, Yoshimi hysterically confronts him during one of their mediations. A sympathetic male lawyer warns her to pull herself together: "If you continue along this path, growing weaker by the day, it will be

nearly impossible for you to gain custody."

Meanwhile, Ikuko, who has taken to playing with an imaginary friend, collapses during a game of Hide and Seek, sending a frantic Yoshimi to her kindergarten where a child's drawing catches the woman's eye. It's little more than a stick figure, but with its crayon impressions of a yellow dress and bright red bag, the portrait is unmistakable. A scrawled message reads, "Come home soon, Mitsuko." "Her mother had abandoned her," offers the school principal. "You never heard of her... the girl who disappeared two years ago?" Later, as she sleeps by Ikuko's side, Yoshimi's face is touched by the dripping from the dark stain above her bed and she has an eerie dream about the faceless Mitsuko entering their apartment building during a torrential rain. When she awakens, Ikuko is gone. After a frantic search, the child is found sleepwalking

in the apartment above, which is ankle-deep in water cascading from open faucets. As Yoshimi carries her daughter out, she feels compelled to look at the names listed above the door. What she reads sends her heart racing: "Shoji and Mitsuko Kawai." Unable to convince anyone that the building is haunted without appearing insane, Yoshimi reluctantly resigns to solving the mystery of Mitsuko's death and appeasing the restless spirit before it can supersede her ex-husband's efforts and take her daughter away forever.

Based, like *Ringu*, on a novel by author Kôji Suzuki, **DARK WATER** parallels the former in many respects. At the core of both works is an immature female who is abused by a parent and perishes in water—to say more than this would be inappropriate in this review. Both films feature a female protagonist—a single mother struggling to juggle work (not to mention

the story's supernatural conflict) with the needs of her one child—only this is not so much a feminist statement as it is a concern for the destruction of old family values in an increasingly modernized Japan. In addition, the ghosts share an aesthetic that is based somewhat on the classic *yurei* (the Japanese term for a typically female ghost who seeks retribution for her untimely demise) and includes a simplified kamino-like outfit (Mitsuko's raincoat is a clever modern variation), rigid limbs and obscuring hair. The blurring of Mitsuko's face on a "Missing Child" poster and her almost blank-slate guise in distant shots recall the distorted photos of *Ringu* and the almost featureless clay bust that becomes Sadako's visage in **RING 2**.

Despite these similarities, **DARK WATER** never seems like a rehash; if anything, it is an expansion (or improvement) on themes from the earlier, more roughly-hewn work. Both films spend considerable time piecing together the puzzle of an elaborate backstory, yet in **DARK WATER**, the end result resonates more powerfully, due in no small part to Suzuki's and Nakata's stronger emphasis on character development. *Ringu* was crafted with bold black and white strokes; the ghost was unquestionably real. **DARK WATER**, on the other hand, takes the Henry James approach and offers more thought-provoking ambiguity. In the final analysis, Yoshimi *could* be insane, and the ghost of Mitsuko might actually be a fabrication of the troubled woman's suppressed memories of her own past abandonment. To reinforce the conceit, Nakata visualizes Yoshimi's childhood flashbacks and her dreams of

Mitsuko with the same eerie yellow tint. He also frames both characters as tiny figures in the doorways of their respective schools—so petrified and reduced by their neglect that they appear more like fragile jars than human beings.

This is also perhaps the best horror film about apartment living since Roman Polanski's *La Locataire* [US: **THE TENANT**, 1976] and is bound to draw comparisons to that paranoia study, as well as **ROSEMARY'S BABY** (1968), which also featured a heroine who doubted her sanity. The major difference is that Polanski populated his tenement houses with eccentric secondary characters, whereas Nakata's *mise en scène* is comparatively bleak and vacated. The increasing isolation of the protagonist recalls David Lynch's unsurpassable exercise in solitude, **ERASER-HEAD** (1977), as well as Kiyoshi Kurosawa's apocalyptic *kaidan eiga*, *Kairo* (aka **PULSE**, 2001). But the overriding Western influence has to be Nicolas Roeg's **DON'T LOOK NOW** (1973), a Daphne Du Maurier ghost story with many of the same elements: a drowned child and an unhinged parent's pursuit of a hooded "little person" in a flooded environment (Venice).

Not surprisingly, considering the title, Nakata soaks us in an image system and sound design that incorporates water into almost every scene, ranging from tiny drops to torrential downpours. The amount of water is often tied to the emotions of the characters, which are sometimes bottled-up (as in Mitsuko's rain-drenched flashback) or dramatically extroverted (as in the frenzied climax that has water erupting from everywhere). Even

if water isn't dripping or gushing, it's always on the verge of doing so: when Yoshimi enters the apartment for the first time, she refers to the "unreal" humidity. Typically, Japanese ghost stories are set in hot summer months, a tradition Nakata upholds by adding an omnipresent layer of insect sounds to every scene that doesn't involve rain, just to keep us feeling hot and sticky.

Okay, so it's got atmosphere, but is **DARK WATER** scarier than *Ringu*? While Mitsuko isn't the unmitigating force of evil that Sadako was, her frequent manifestations—punctuated by glassy squeals from Kenji Kawai's unsettling synth score—still inspire plenty of dread. Both films build to the anticipative moment when the ghost's face is unveiled; and if anything, Nakata has surpassed *Ringu* with a revelatory shot that literally made this reviewer's flesh crawl.

DARK WATER comes to Region 3 DVD via WideSight Entertainment, a Hong Kong company, in a supplement-deprived edition that offers a more-than-satisfactory anamorphic transfer (happily, 16:9 enhancement is becoming more common with Chinese DVDs) and optional, typo-free English subtitles that ride higher in the frame than usual, but are small and ultimately don't obstruct. The original Japanese soundtrack comes in a fine DD-5.1 configuration, but a DTS-ES 6.1 alternative offers an even cleaner and more realistic soundscape that will have members of your household wondering if it's raining outside or, worse, calling the plumber. Available from Poker Industries (See Sources.)

SCHOOL KILLER

aka *El vigilante*

2001, Paramount Home

Entertainment (Spain) #29693,

DD-5.1/MA/16:9/LB/ST/+,

\$34.99, 85m 47s, DVD-2 (PAL)

By John Charles

Paul Naschy made his name in the Spanish horror pantheon by specializing in sympathetic monsters, most notably his accursed werewolf Waldemar Daninsky. While it is nice to see him center stage again in a slick theatrical production, the decision to reduce him to a frothing maniac in a routine slasher scenario may be disconcerting to fans expecting a bit more. On a stormy Friday evening, teenager Ramón (Carlos Fuentes) takes five friends for a weekend excursion to the isolated and decrepit Monte Alto International School, formerly a dumping ground for maladjusted rich kids, which has been shuttered for the past thirty years. Ramón came up with the idea because his father, Alex (Antonio Areñas, a dead ringer for Al Adamson regular Richard Smedley), and some friends did the same thing at the school during their Easter break in 1973.



When the movie is called *SCHOOL KILLER* and Paul Naschy is playing the school's custodian, you know you're in for mayhem.

Even before the kids enter the building, inexplicable things begin to occur. The wires are clearly disconnected but the girls see electric illumination in two of the windows. Ramón later observes this phenomenon for himself, as well as other proof that there is someone else on the grounds,

but decides to withhold this news from the others. The group then discover some other partying youths in the building, and suspect they are responsible, but something is just not right. When one of the girls disappears and is found murdered, Ramón is forced to come clean about what happened to his father on that night back in 1973. Alex and his dope-smoking *compañeros* were stalked and gradually eliminated by the building's impoverished guard (Naschy), who has gone insane and seeks to murder these rich "deviants" who dare trespass in "his" school. Alex survived by murdering the assailant and dumping his body down the school's well. Clearly, the killer's spirit has returned to claim new victims, and Ramón and his friends are trapped in a bizarre reality intermingling them with events that took place three decades ago.

With its overproduced visuals and fidgety editing, **SCHOOL**



KILLER looks like the work of yet another twentysomething music video graduate. This is Carlos Gil's feature debut, but he has actually been in the business for over thirty years, serving as assistant director on notable productions like **THE VALLEY OF GWANGI**, **THE GOLDEN VOYAGE OF SINBAD**, and the second and third entries in the **INDIANA JONES** series. However, his first effort in the driver's seat is strictly run-of-the-mill slasher fare, burdened by all of the sub-genre's most glaring debits. Characters try to rationalize weird occurrences with explanations no one would believe, split off from the group for ludicrous reasons, and find even more implausible excuses for not leaving the premises post-haste. "Immorality" (ie., sex) equals death and there is even a third-wheel black teen who gets the least amount of dialogue and emphasis (though, at least, he is not the first to be killed). An attempt has been made to update this tired cycle by having one of the guys record the action via a minicam strapped to his head; his ability to playback and study earlier events does offer a spark of originality. Characters reference **A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET**, **SCREAM 3**, and **THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT** and, when they learn that the original party took place on Friday the 13th, one remarks "That's only something Yanks should care about." Unfortunately, the fact that the protagonists are aware of horror clichés is nothing more than a flimsy excuse to actually indulge in them. When screenwriters Tino Blanco and Mercedes Holgueras add ghosts and the paranormal (a specialty of one of the kids) to the mix, things

simply bog down, grow increasingly muddled, and culminate in an easily forecast and unsatisfying wrap-up. As the killer, Naschy (nameless but billed as "El Vigilante") gets to glare maniacally on numerous occasions, and commands the screen for brief moments, but the part is insubstantial; it could have been played almost as effectively by a masked stuntman. The gore (including a hatchet decapitation and some vicious knife wounds) is fairly bloody and might require a couple of small snips to get an "R" rating stateside.

Paramount has treated this marginal feature to a double disc special edition with more supplements than their American arm bestows upon far more important and famous productions! Unfortunately, only the feature is translated, so these extras will be of limited interest to anyone who doesn't speak Spanish. Disc 1 presents the film (which would run 89m 26s at 24 fps) in anamorphic 1.80:1 and the image looks very good, with strong hues, stark blacks, and good contrasts. The (post-synched) 5.1 mix is hardly groundbreaking, but offers sufficient power and atmosphere, and optional Spanish or English subtitles (which lag behind the dialogue and sometimes only appear for a split second) are included. There is also an audio commentary by Gil and Spanish-dubbed trailers for **GINGER SNAPS**, **DEEP IN THE WOODS**, **WISHMASTER 3**, and **ED GEIN**, plus a few seconds of behind-the-scenes footage from the director's most recent feature, the military actioner **Alas rotas** ("Broken Wings"). The layer change (50:44) mildly disrupts the audio but is, otherwise, seamless.

Disc 2 is single layer and offers the trailer, a photo gallery, bios (the one for Naschy is quite detailed), and a 12m 55s "Making Of..." (inexplicably presented with the brightness and contrast levels cranked way up during the film clips) with brief interviews and behind-the-scenes footage. A separate interviews section offers additional commentary from the actors. Available from Poker Industries (see Sources).

THE VAMPIRE

El Vampiro

1957, *Mondo Macabro* #MMD103, DD-1.0/MA/ST/+, £9.99, 83m 42s, DVD-0 (PAL)

ALUCARDA

Alucarda la hija de las tinieblas

1975, *Mondo Macabro* #MMD100, DD-1.0/+, £9.99, 74m 38s, DVD-0 (PAL)
By Bill Cooke

While fans of Asian and Italian cult cinema have had much to be thankful for over the years, those of us awaiting original Spanish-language versions of Mexican fantasy films on DVD have not been so fortunate. Perhaps the tide is about to turn, for *Mondo Macabro*—an exciting new UK label—has entered the ring with respectful treatments of two of Latin America's most important contributions to the horror genre.

It's natural to assume that Fernando Méndez's *El Vampiro* [US: **THE VAMPIRE**] was made to cash-in on the success of Hammer's **HORROR OF DRACULA** (1958), but it was actually produced one year before Britain's influential vampire opus. The film was the brainchild of actor/producer Abel Salazar, a fan of Universal's horror output of the 1930s and '40s, who sought to emulate the revered US fright



*Germán Robles haunts the familiar sets of Churubusco Studios in Abel Salazar's Mexican horror classic **THE VAMPIRE**.*

factory by forming his own monster movie franchise.

The plot finds young Marta Gonzales (Ariadne Welter, previously seen in Buñuel's **THE CRIMINAL LIFE OF ARCHIBALDO DE LA CRUZ**) returning to the Sycamores, only to find her happy childhood home sadly run down and her relatives suffering a similar pall of despair. Aunt Maria Teresa (Alicia Montoya), who had taken ill after raving about vampires, is now dead and interred in the family crypt while Aunt Eloise (Carmen Montejo) appears unnaturally young and healthy for her age. Eloise is under the spell of her Hungarian neighbor, Count Duval (Germán Robles), a vampire that makes nightly visits to remind everyone that he intends to buy the Sycamores. As the third-party owner of the estate, only Marta stands to oppose

Duval's will; and when the girl refuses to sell, Duval takes the form of a bat and swoops into her bedroom to snack on her neck. According to local lore, if Marta is bitten a second time, she will die and become an undead slave. Thankfully, a hero is in the house in the form of amiable Dr. Enrique Salazar (Abel Salazar), who discovers that Duval is actually Lavud, brother to Count Karol of Lavud, a notorious vampire that was put to death by the Gonzales family a hundred years before. In a Poe-like plot development, it turns out that Maria Teresa was entombed alive; and as the madwoman struggles to hold down her undead sister, Enrique is free to battle the vengeance-seeking Lavud for Marta's soul.

For genre aficionados, **THE VAMPIRE** is a missing link in the evolution of the gothic horror

film. Its misty studio-crafted forest sets and spider-web infested manor interiors both pay *hommage* to 1940s Universal horror while anticipating the late-'50s explosion of Italian gothics. But the film is more than just an ode: by meshing the Universal style with a decidedly Mexican emphasis on Catholic-religious ceremony and iconography, Salazar's production achieves a unique atmosphere among vampire pictures, aided considerably by Rosalio Salano's moody cinematography.

Just as the film's art direction is simultaneously backward and forward thinking, so is Germán Robles' portrayal of the vampire lord. While his costume is clearly patterned after that of Bela Lugosi, Robles' take on Dracula (for Lavud *is* Dracula in every respect but the name)



Susana Kamini gets an education she doesn't expect in Juan L. Moctezuma's *ALUCARDA*.

combines matinee-idol good looks with a wild animal-like temper—a kind of amalgam of Christopher Lee and Frank Langella. Terence Fisher fans will find the swashbuckling final confrontation between Robles and Salazar an interesting prelude to the similarly athletic (and much better) finale of **HORROR OF DRACULA**.

Mondo Macabro offers **THE VAMPIRE** with optional Spanish or English-dubbed audio tracks. Speaking in its original language, the cast is a delight, especially Abel Salazar, who reportedly based his comic/charismatic persona on William Powell in **THE THIN MAN** series. With his original voice restored, Salazar shows a terrific enthusiasm and sense of humor that is totally lost in the K. Gordon Murray-produced dubbed versions of his films.

Today the plot of **THE VAMPIRE** may seem a little silly, its effects creaky (man-to-bat transformations are achieved by simply cutting the camera), and its blood-and-thunder score by Gustavo C. Carrion a little too obvious. But, in 1957, the film was a sensation with the working class audience that Abel Salazar was aiming to satisfy. Suddenly the Mexican film industry became infatuated with horror and fantasy subjects, and Salazar's own production company made many of the cycle's most memorable films, including *El Barón del terror* [US: **THE BRAINIAC**] and *La Maldición de la Llorona* [US: **CURSE OF THE CRYING WOMAN**, both 1961]. But by the mid-1960s, interest in horror began to wane as a new generation of radical-minded *auteurs* sought to break

away from the confines of genre filmmaking to produce more socially and artistically challenging works.

One of these "new wave" filmmakers was Juan López Moctezuma, who began his artistic life as a painter before branching off into radio (he created the popular radio program *PANORAMA DE JAZZ*, which ran for 35 years), comic books and theater. Together with the Chilean avant-gardist Alejandro Jodorowsky, Moctezuma formed *Arrabal le Panique* (The Panic Theater), a company devoted to modern, shocking stage works. After collaborating with Jodorowsky on the landmark surrealist films *Fando y Lis* (1967) and *EL TOPO* (1969), Moctezuma found the confidence to direct his own films, starting with the Poe-inspired *La Mansión de la*

Locura [US: **DR. TARR'S TORTURE DUNGEON**, 1971]. Continuing in horror, he followed quickly with **MARY, MARY BLOODY MARY** (1974) and **ALUCARDA** (released in Mexico as **Alucarda la hija de las tinieblas**), both fascinating mixtures of art and exploitation that were produced in English to achieve wider distribution.

There is a dizzying moment in **ALUCARDA** when the title character—a sexually repressed teenage girl—goes berserk and starts spinning around and around. She grips a crucifix necklace and shakes it spasmodically while screaming, and it seems as if, at any moment, the walls of rationality that surround her will shatter. Similarly, Moctezuma's film is constantly on the verge of spinning wildly out of control... and occasionally, to our delight, it does.

The story—a mixture of vampire and exorcism themes set against a backdrop of nunsploitation—begins in a Satanic temple where a young Victorian woman (Tina Romero) gives birth to a baby girl before succumbing to an attack by invisible demonic forces. Fifteen years later, orphaned teenager Justine (Susana Kamini) arrives at a convent where she is to live and be educated. Her roommate is the rebellious Alucarda (also Tina Romero)—obviously the baby from the prologue since she has a name that is a feminized anagram of "Dracula." The girls take to each other immediately; Alucarda's interest is tinged with sexual attraction while the innocent Justine remains, for a short while anyway, naïve to her friend's advances. Justine is also unaware that she is loved by Alucarda's symbolic opposite, the sweet Sister Angélica (Tina

French). On a field trip, the girls visit a gypsy camp and Alucarda, fascinated by their pagan lifestyle, accepts a phallic-like knife from a satyr-like hunchback (Claudio Brook). Later, the girls stumble upon the temple from the prologue. Inside, they find a crumbling casket labelled Lucy Westenra. When she throws open the coffin lid, the girls are frightened by the sight of a moldy corpse and the deafening roar of an invisible force.

Back at the convent, Justine faints during a sermon and Alucarda's restlessness evokes the hunchback gypsy out of the shadows of their room. He uses the knife to initiate the girls into a witches' sabbath where they drink each other's blood and participate in an orgy. Sensing the evil that is erupting, Angélica preys to God and sends a psychic blow to the witches, killing their leader. From that point on, it is sheer pandemonium at the convent. When Alucarda and Justine disrupt a class with their hysterical screams and praises to Satan, Father Lázaro (David Silva) declares that they are possessed by "A Heliophobic demon! That's a 6th category devil who hates light! We must prepare an *exorcism*!"

Previously released by various domestic video labels as **SISTERS OF SATAN**, **INNOCENTS FROM HELL** and **MARK OF THE DEVIL 3**, **ALUCARDA** can be an endurance test to some (there is *much* European-style post-dubbed screaming); however, the film is rife with poetic imagery and is arguably the high-water mark of Mexican horror in the 1970s. Though considered a vampire picture, the vampire elements are actually rather slight, overwhelmed as they are by the possession/exorcism themes that

Moctezuma probably found more exploitable in 1975. For Dracula fans, there is the puzzling suggestion that Lucy Westenra (*the* Lucy from Bram Stoker's **DRACULA**) was Alucarda's mother. But the film's most glorious paean to vampirism (and single most shocking moment) is when Sister Angélica opens a coffin to discover the nude, undead Justine lying in a bubbling pool of blood. Soaked red from the neck down and with eyes bulging (remember, this presages **CARRIE** by a few years), Justine rises from her bed/bath and tears out the nun's throat with her teeth before help arrives with vials of death-dealing Holy water.

Witchcraft and exorcism films such as **THE BLOOD ON SATAN'S CLAW** (1970) and **THE EXORCIST** (1973) are an obvious influence in the more hysterical sequences. But more interesting are the parallels to Peter Weir's contemporary **PICNIC AT HANGING ROCK** (1975), which haunt the early scenes of Victorian teenagers frolicking in a woodland setting. Just as **PICNIC**'s precocious Miranda led her friends through a passage of sexual awakening, so does Alucarda open Justine's eyes to the sensuality of the natural world as she marvels over two blood-red mites crawling over a clump of moss in the palm of her hand. The visual metaphor is echoed a moment later, as the two girls roll around and embrace in a sea of thick green grass that parts and clumps in ways that erotically suggest mounds of hair.

"Movies are, for me, magical instruments," Moctezuma once said. "It's a way of building other worlds." Nowhere is the director's philosophy more elegantly realized than in the unique and

mesmerizing *mise en scène* of **ALUCARDA**. In addition to the aforementioned bushy grass, there is the gargoyle-laden temple of Alucarda's birth which, when seen on the outside, seems to be curtained by skin-like sheets of fabric that have grown into (or out of) the stone. The most striking set is the convent's cavernous chapel where Christ figures seem to be organically sprouting out of the walls. The imaginative look of the film extends to the costumes, especially the nuns' outlandish gauze get-ups—white but repugnantly stained, they are a disturbing combination of mummy and burn-victim aesthetics.

Since Moctezuma was not fond of Mexican popular cinema and the Salazar-brand horror films it produced, the director drew his inspiration from Surrealist artists such as filmmaker Luis Buñuel (thus informing his use of Claudio Brook) and late-19th century French author J.K. Huysmans. Parallels can be drawn between **ALUCARDA** and Huysmans' *LÀ-BAS*, a novel that caused a furor in 1891 because of its realistic descriptions of black masses. Through the course of writing his novel, Huysmans exorcised his own agnosticism and reverted back to Catholicism, a journey of faith that Moctezuma seems to be emulating with **ALUCARDA**. Though the director often shows sympathy for the possessed girls ("You worship death," Alucarda screams at a priest, "I worship life!"), he still refuses to turn his film's religious figures into the self-serving sadists of Michael Reeves' **WITCHFINDER GENERAL** (aka **THE CONQUEROR WORM**, 1968) or the political opportunists of Ken Russell's **THE DEVILS** (1971). Despite a doctor's horror over Father Lázaro's methods for exorcising

Justine (she eventually dies), the fact remains that the girl *was* possessed by a demon. In the fire-and-brimstone finale, Alucarda unleashes her fury on the convent for causing Justine's death (a teenager lashing out psychically—again, a presage to **CARRIE**). As fireballs erupt everywhere, the surviving nuns carry in the dead body of Angélica and hold her up to Alucarda in a crucified pose. Moctezuma, like Huysmans, finally accepts Catholicism as the ultimate power. Screaming in terror, the black witch cannot fight such a potent religious symbol. She falls to the ground and dissipates.

The transfers are a mixed bag. **THE VAMPIRE** is entirely watchable, and an authorized release, but shows only slight improvement over Beverly Wilshire's unauthorized achievements in this arena. The picture exhibits okay contrasts, but is lacking sufficient detail in long shots. Most distressing is a frame-dragging phenomenon that is noticeable whenever the camera pans or the subject moves rapidly. **ALUCARDA**, on the other hand, doesn't suffer from frame dragging and looks just fine. The image is soft at times, but pleasingly so. Colors are rendered beautifully; even subtle color schemes are effectively conveyed such as the varying shades of yellow and purple decay that color the convent walls and the nuns' white gauze habits. Both films are presented as they were shot, in the Academy ratio of 1.37:1.

Mondo Macabro offers some nice extra features. Exclusive to **THE VAMPIRE** is a photonovel of the film's sequel, *El Ataud del Vampiro* [US: **THE VAMPIRE'S COFFIN**, 1957]. Produced in the same year as its predecessor and featuring many of the same actors portraying the same roles,

Salazar's continuation of the Count Lavud story, though lacking the production values of the first film, is a lot like spending time with old friends. **ALUCARDA**'s extras include a biography, filmography and a 1977 text interview with Juan López Moctezuma. The director, who died in 1995, mentions his plans to produce a sequel to **ALUCARDA** that were sadly never realized.

Both discs contain a short documentary on Mexican horror movies by Pete Tombs and Andy Starke. Ignacio Duran, Director General of the Mexican Cultural Institute, is on hand to declare **THE VAMPIRE** "a masterpiece," as well as offer interesting stories about Abel Salazar and **BRAINIAC** director Chano Ureta ("a strange man"). The liberal use of footage from some of these films (including Ureta's surreal **THE WITCH'S MIRROR**) teasingly suggests that Mondo Macabre has more Mexican horror releases planned for the future.

THE VAMPIRE and **ALUCARDA** are both available as imports from Xploited Cinema (see Sources), priced at \$20.95 apiece.

At the time of this writing, Mondo Macabro has entered the North American market with a Region 0 NTSC disc of **ALUCARDA** that, according to early reports, features a noticeably sharper and more colorful transfer and an alternate Spanish-dubbed soundtrack. Special features are also different, forsaking the television documentary on Mexi-horror for a 15m featurette on Juan López Moctezuma and a few appreciative words from director Guillermo del Toro (**THE DEVIL'S BACKBONE**, **BLADE II**) who had the pleasure of working with the late Claudio Brook on his own **CRONOS** (1993).





By Douglas E. Winter

The Best and the Rest of 2002

Light the candles, folks! This issue marks my 75th consecutive column for VIDEO WATCHDOG, and there's no better way to celebrate than with our annual "Best of the Year" survey.

As in the past, winners (and losers) were chosen in consultation with a panel of fellow enthusiasts: artist/musician Michael Barry, James Carrocino, and Perry Glorioso of Landmark Theatres. The nominees were limited to compact discs released or first distributed in the United States in 2002. Nominations were compiled and a consensus was reached among the panelists, with results that prove more comprehensive (and hopefully more fulfilling) than other music awards, especially those seen on TV. And now, those envelopes, please...

BEST ORIGINAL SCORE: "Original" is the decisive factor in our essential category. Howard Shore—last year's winner for **THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING**—earns a close second this time with **THE TWO TOWERS** (Reprise/WMG Soundtracks 48379-2, \$19.99, 19 tracks, 72m 46s); but the reuse and reinvention of themes from the first film proved its downfall in the balloting. The same concern dampened the title hopes of Philip Glass' **THE HOURS** (None-such 79693-2, \$18.99, 14 tracks, 57m 39s), which recycled some earlier compositions. Two other contenders—Takefumi Haketa's chilling cues for

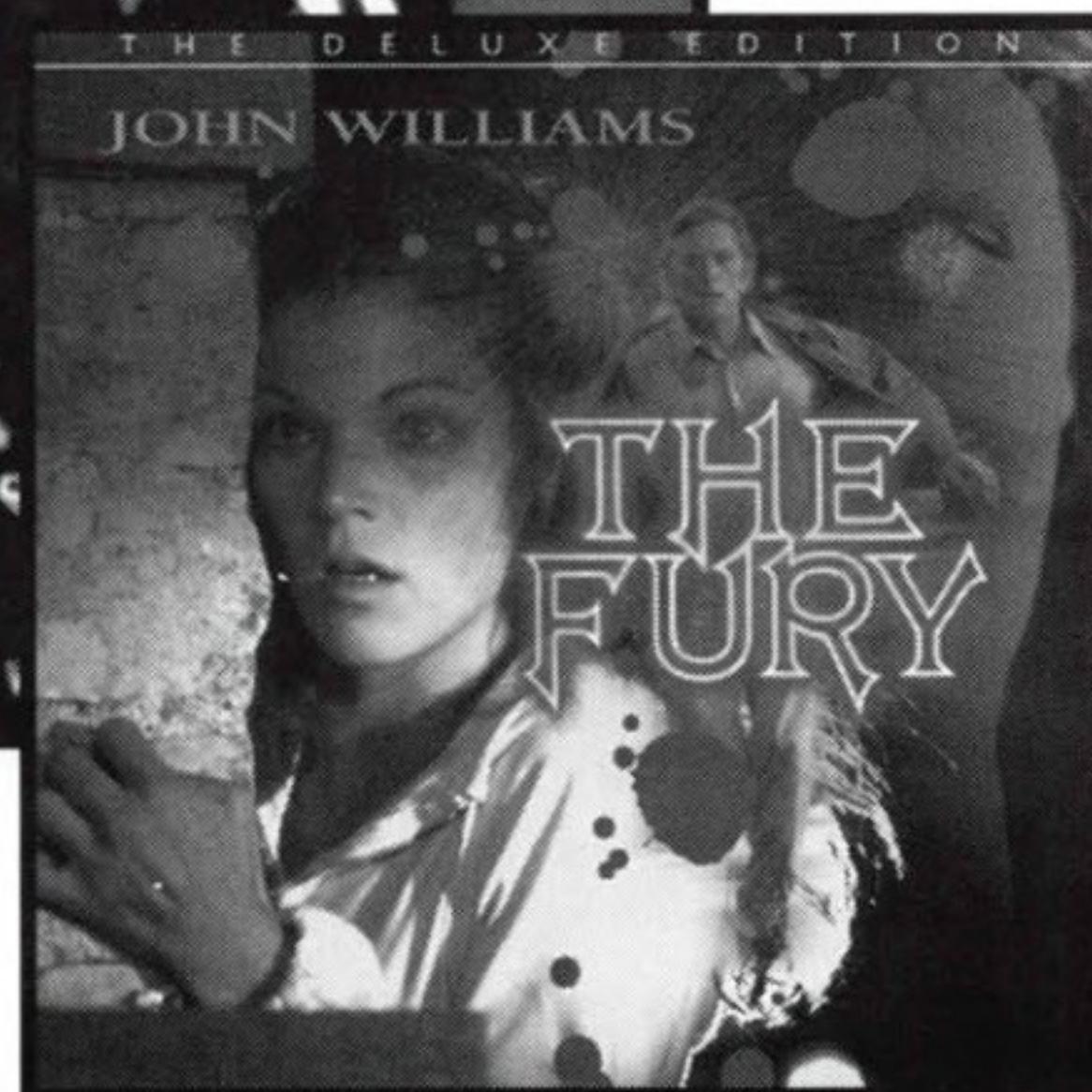
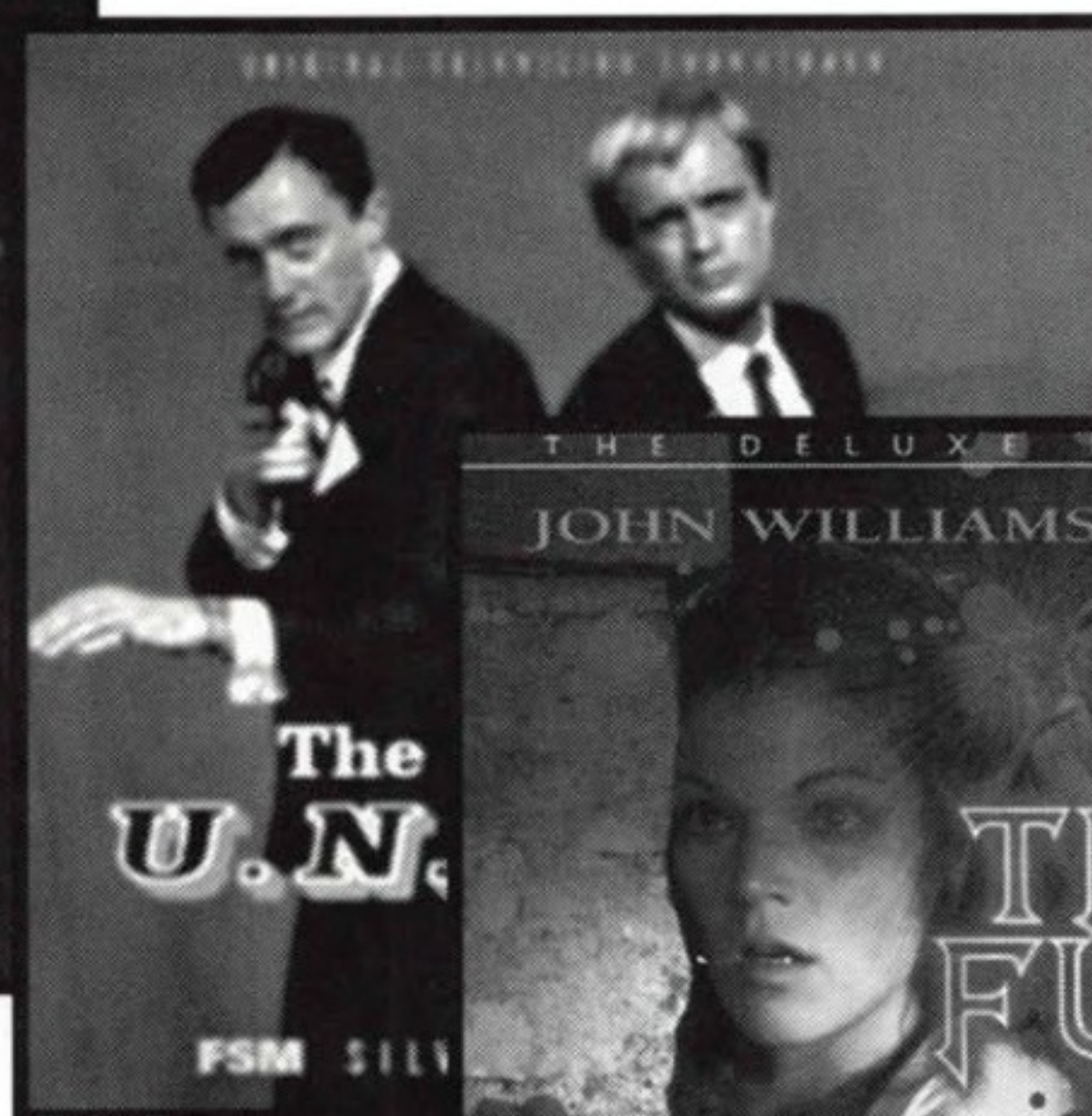
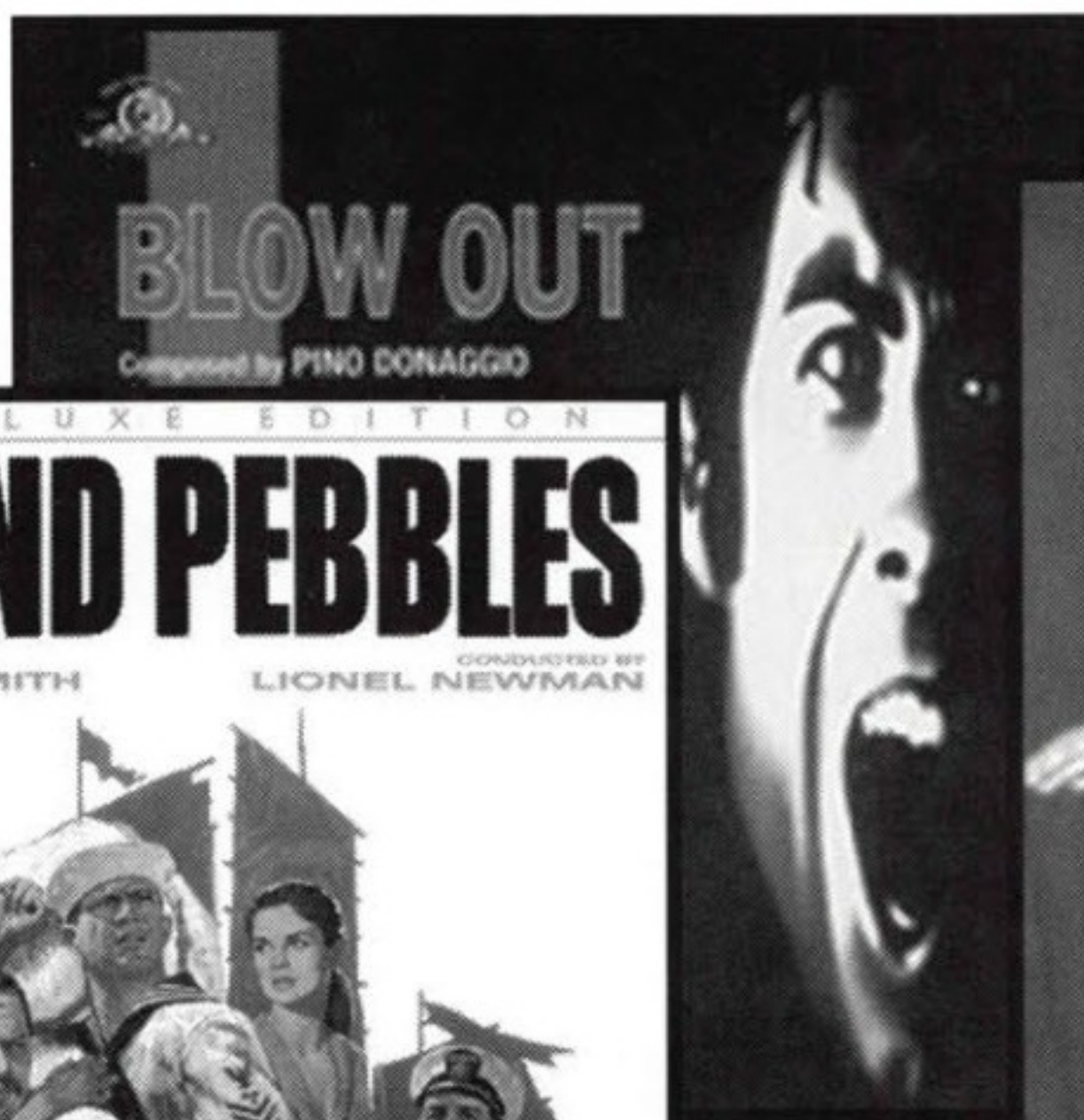
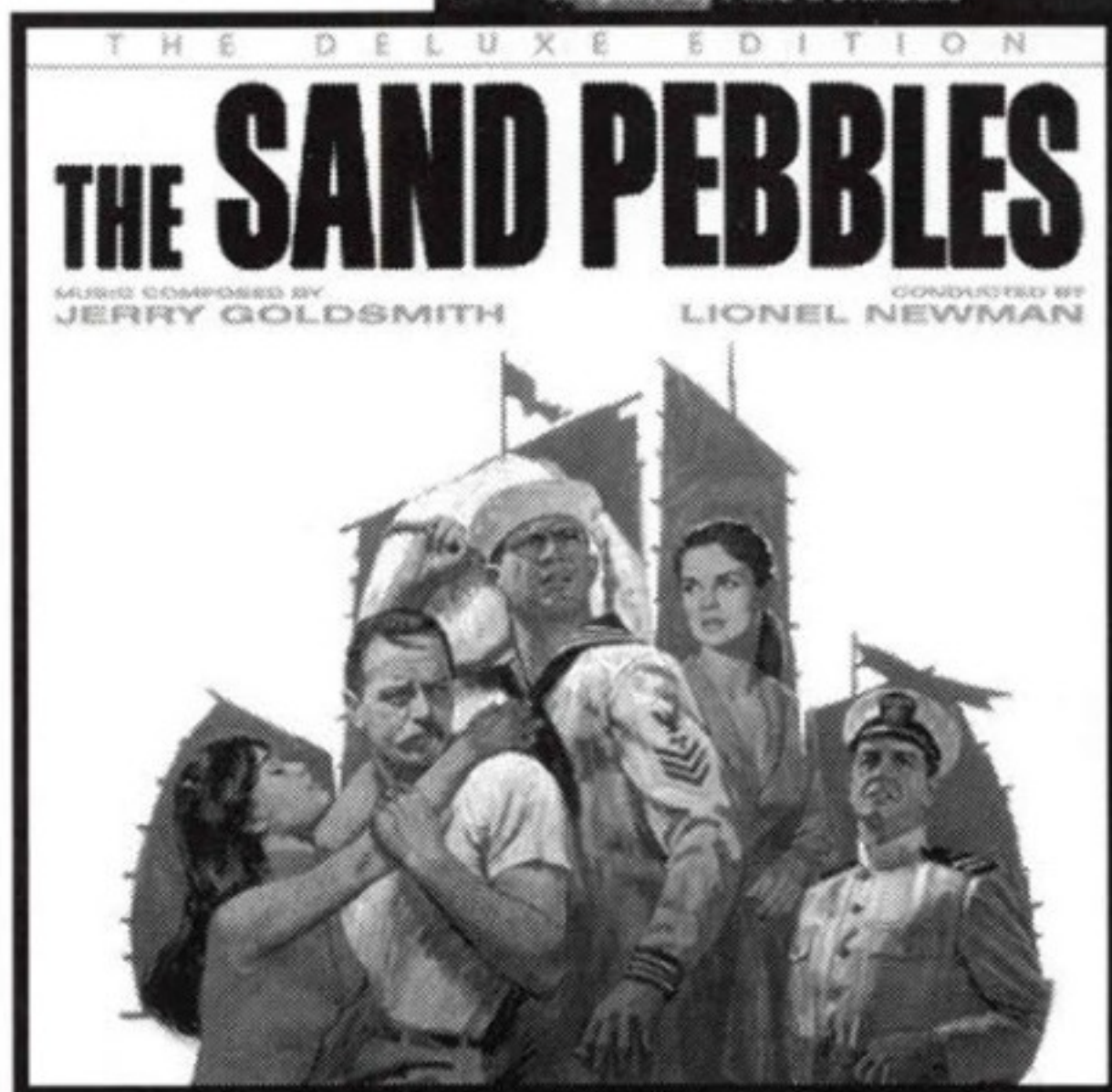


Koyashi Kurosawa's **Kairo** (Daiei MTCE-1001, Japan, ¥2,520, 16 tracks, 28m 33s) and Bruno Coulais' North African blend for **Belphegor: Le Fantôme du Louvre** (WEA/Warner Music France 85738 7599 2, France, approx. \$19.99, 17 tracks, 54m 40s)—were actually issued in 2001 but have yet to find stateside distribution.

The year's top choice thus proved unanimous: Elmer Bernstein's neo/retro masterpiece for Todd Haynes' Sirkian **FAR FROM HEAVEN** (Varèse Sarabande 302 066 421 2, \$17.98, 22 tracks, 45m 30s). This is no sentimental gesture meant to honor a 50-year veteran of film music, but recognizes a genuine classic—a delicate and profoundly understated score that evokes the emotions of an era without indulging familiar tropes. **FAR FROM HEAVEN** offers music very close to Heaven, and is a fitting bookend to Bernstein's early triumph **TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD** (1962).

WORST ORIGINAL SCORE: Lousy scores are abundant, but here we single out well-known composers who stumble in wince-worthy ways. The legendary Jerry Goldsmith spaced out once too often in **STAR TREK: NEMESIS** (Varèse Sarabande 302 066 412 2, \$17.98, 14 tracks, 45m 41s); but this year's poster child for overwork is Danny Elfman, with his by-the-numbers compositions for **MEN IN BLACK II** (Columbia/Overbrook/Sony CK 86295, \$19.99, 20 tracks, 53m 19s) and **RED DRAGON** (Decca 289 473 248-2 ST01, \$18.99, 17 tracks, 57m 15s).

BEST COMPILATION SCORE: Manchester rules! The best compilation in years powered **24 HOUR PARTY PEOPLE**, Michael Winterbottom's chronicle of Britpop impresario Tony Wilson



(Warner/Essential R2-78136, \$18.98, 18 tracks, 77m 57s). With period tracks from Joy Division, New Order, Happy Mondays *et al*, the disc is a perfect companion to the film, accompanied by liner notes from Wilson himself. Runner-up: **MOULIN ROUGE VOLUME 2** (Interscope 606949 3228 2, \$18.98, 11 tracks, 42m 54s). Released in 2002 with the film's appearance on DVD, this disc is superior to its predecessor, featuring original and re-recorded songs along with elements of the magnificent underscore by Craig Armstrong.

BEST ARCHIVAL RELEASE: 2002 was another great year for tapes that have hidden far too long in the vaults; our choices proved so daunting that we're declaring a four-way tie.

BLOW OUT (Prometheus, Belgium, PCR 515, \$19.99, 21 tracks, 51m 18s) presents, at long last, Pino Donaggio's original score in breathtaking quality—blessed relief for those who've suffered with the dry bootleg or the vinyl re-recording, with all the wrong tempos, from Japan. The resurrection of the Varèse Sarabande CD Club brought us **THE FURY: THE DELUXE EDITION** (Varèse Sarabande Club VCL 0702 1011, \$24.98, two discs, 32 tracks, 95m 59s). The first LP/CD release of John Williams' score was a re-recording with the London Symphony Orchestra; although effective, the original tracks, available here for the first time, are a revelation—and Varèse wisely issued both versions in this two-CD set.

THE MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E. (FSM Vol. 5 no. 18, \$24.95, two discs, 25 tracks, 153m 13s) is Film Score Monthly's most ambitious package to date, premiering suites from 20 U.N.C.L.E. episodes and Jerry Goldsmith's memorable main and end titles—and Goldsmith at his very best is heard in

THE SAND PEBBLES: THE DELUXE EDITION (Varèse Sarabande Club VCL 0702 1010, \$19.98, 30 tracks, 76m 28s).

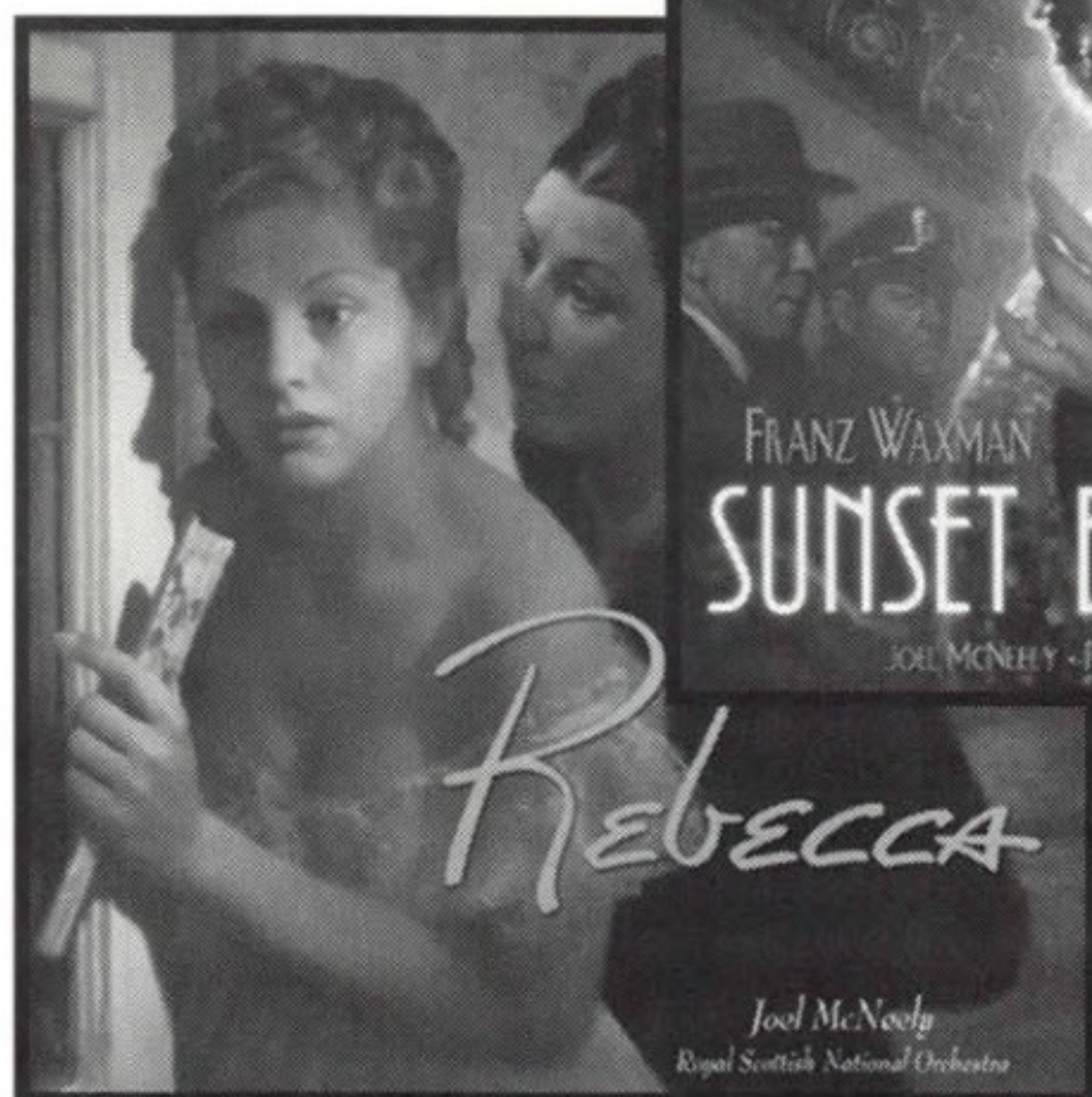
BEST RE-RECORDING: This one's a coin-toss between two performances by the Royal Scottish Orchestra, directed by Joel McNeely, of classic Franz Waxman scores: **REBECCA** (Varèse Sarabande 302 066 160 2, \$17.98, 18 tracks, 54m 4s) and **SUNSET BOULEVARD** (Varèse Sarabande 302 066 316 2, \$17.98, 25 tracks, 69m 36s). As James Carrocino notes: "The loving care that went into these releases, along with beautiful packaging and artwork, showcase classic film music for new listeners and set a high standard for future re-recordings."

SLEEPER SCORE: Among soundtracks that received little notoriety but deserve acclaim, our winner is the stunning Hans Zimmer/Klaus Badelt collaboration on **INVINCIBLE** (Milan 73138-35958-2, \$17.99, 13 tracks, 47m 39s), while our runners-up are diverse and delightful: Toshiyuki Honda's bizarre orchestral/dixieland score for the Japanese animated **METROPOLIS** (Domo Records 73003-2, \$18.98, 20 tracks, 59m 16s); Jan A.P. Kaczmarek's haunting cues for **UNFAITHFUL** (Varèse Sarabande 302 066 356 2, \$17.98, 19 tracks, 44m 3s); Gabriel Yared's **POSSESSION**, with passionate vocals by Ramon Vargas (RCA Victor 63882, \$18.98, 21 tracks, 66m 54s); and the militaristic **REIGN OF FIRE** from Edward Shearmer (Varèse Sarabande 302 066 374 2, \$17.98, 14 tracks, 50m 38s).

BEST COLLECTION: Buzzing to unanimous triumph is Percepto's World Premiere of the original scores from 20th Century Fox's horror trilogy **THE FLY**, **RETURN OF THE FLY**, and **CURSE OF**

THE FLY (Percepto-008, \$29.95, two discs, 99m 19s). The lovingly remastered music of Paul Sawtell and Bert Shefter, presented with a lavish 56-page booklet, confirms Percepto's arrival as a real player in the world of film music.

BEST OF THE GREY MARKET: Known in years past as "Best of the Boots," this category also embraces off-shore curiosities and promotional CDs. The latter discs, issued by studios and composers for awards consideration and publicity, are fast becoming "must have" items for collectors. Last year's notable promos included Trevor Jones' music for the TV miniseries **DINOTOPIA** (CMR-2002-2,



\$17.95, 12 tracks, 61m 14s), while the best bootlegs were Simon Boswell's **PHOTOGRAPHING FAIRIES** (Anonymous, approx. \$30.00, 18 tracks, 47m 53s) and the ever-elusive Tangerine Dream soundtrack for **THE KEEP**, which found its latest incarnation in a "re-recording" by TD founder Edgar Froese (Orange Records ORCD-2011983, approx. \$40.00, 20 tracks, 79m 57s).

LABEL OF THE YEAR: Our reigning champion, Film Score Monthly, is ineligible for repeat recognition—although 2002 was FSM's best year ever, marking the 50th release in its Golden Age and Silver Age Classics Series. Rhino Records and Percepto both deserve praise and encouragement, but this year's winner is a shoo-in: Varèse Sarabande.

Since its founding in 1978, VS has been a positive and progressive force in film music, offering a diverse catalog of originals and re-recordings. Despite occasional missteps and its infamous truncated releases (dictated, we're told, by licensing

fees), VS has given us many scores that otherwise might never have seen print. With its 25th anniversary imminent, 2002 is the perfect time to raise a glass to this label: VS releases swarm this year's awards, and after a nearly ten-year hiatus, the CD Club returned, offering limited edition releases of rare scores, including Howard Shore's **BIG**, Jerry Goldsmith's **STUDS LONIGAN**, and deluxe versions of **THE FURY** and **THE SAND PEBBLES**. For more information on our Label of the Year, visit www.varesesarabande.com.

THE WATCHDOG'S MOST WANTED: We're looking for a compact disc release—and soon—of what would have been our choice



for Best Television Score of 2002: Sean Callery's 24. And what happened to New Line's disc of George S. Clinton's underscore for **AUSTIN POWERS: GOLDMEMBER**, which spoofed John Barry and Henry Mancini, David Arnold's current Bond sound, and blaxploitation? More vintage desires include the music from Japan's **EVIL DEAD TRAP** films; Maurice Jarre's score for **RESURRECTION** (1980); Raoul Kraushaar's cues for the original **INVADERS FROM MARS** (1953); and an official release of Jerry Goldsmith's **FREUD** (1962). And most of all, we're waiting... still waiting... for Dmitri Tiomkin's **THE THING FROM ANOTHER WORLD** (1951).

Review materials should be sent c/o One Eyed Dog, PO Box 27305, Washington DC 20038. The Audio Watchdog is on-line at OnEyeDog@aol.com.



BIBLIO WATCHDOG

HEAVEN & HELL TO PLAY WITH

THE FILMING OF THE NIGHT OF THE HUNTER

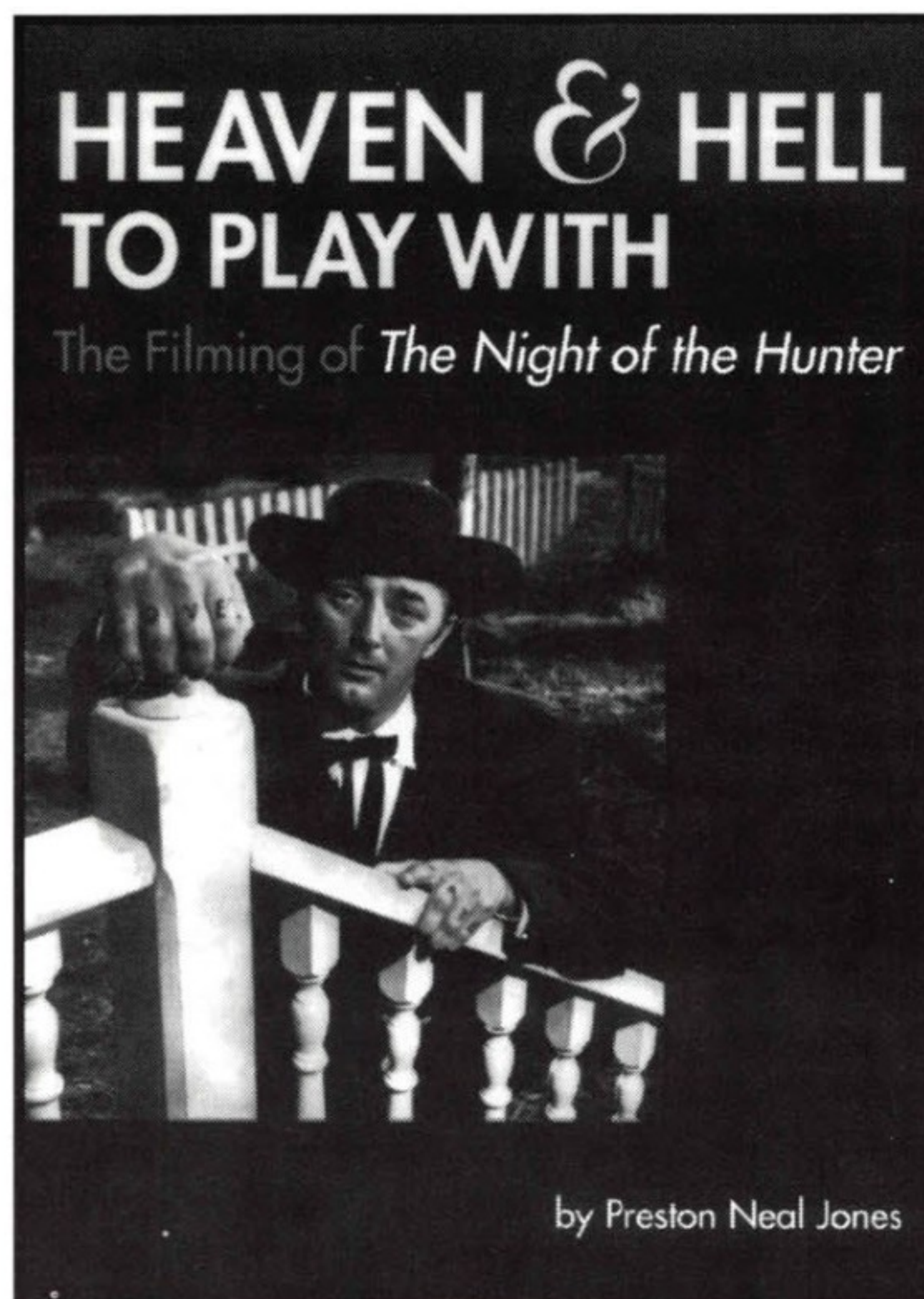
By Preston Neal Jones

Limelight Editions, 118 East 30th Street,
New York NY 10016; www.limelighteditions.com
399 pp., \$18.95 (Softcover)

Reviewed by Charlie Largent

HARRY POWELL is a preacher who seduces lonely spinsters with an eye cocked toward their bank accounts and—if a coy but appropriately *noirish* metaphor can be permitted—cuts their throats upon withdrawal. His pulpit is **THE NIGHT OF THE HUNTER**, a 1955 film pre-saging the ascent of another soul-killing profiteer and sexual hypocrite: the televangelist. It's a comedy of Fundamental terror.

Not for nothing does **THE NIGHT OF THE HUNTER** have a special place in movie history; this one-of-a-kind film is also many of a kind, a smorgasbord of style that reflects the expansive appetites of its brilliant director, Charles Laughton. A movable feast of sight and sound distilled from Davis Grubb's novel and the dustbowl poetry of James Agee's adaptation, the movie was inspired by both photographer Walker Evans' spare clapboard shacks and the rich veneer of Cocteau's fairy tale castles. The film's triumph, and why it continues to stir our jaded palette, is the conception of Harry Powell as a Holy Terror, a slapstick psychopath who executes a pratfall at the same time he's executing a victim. Robert Mitchum's performance as Powell keeps the film fresh as a daisy or (more to the point) a sprig of nightshade; lurking within the sensuous yet forbidding B&W photography of Stanley Cortez, he's Elmer (Gantry) the Ripper. Playing this monster in a comic-grotesque fashion, Mitchum, in fact, gives two performances. There is Powell the cold-blooded manipulator and there is Powell's own self-deluding performance, successfully disguised to himself, to paraphrase Agee, as a righteous preacher-man. The sackcloth this nutcase wears, and the fact that it



keeps slipping at inopportune moments, is the source of most of the film's humor and horror.

Mitchum, Shelley Winters and Cortez all contribute some of the finest work of their careers. As the guardian angel who vanquishes the demon Powell, Lillian Gish has the transcendent gaze of a Madonna with a flapper's beestung lips; she's down to earth and, at the same time, slightly above it. Her presence in this film, which so often quotes the pioneers of silent film, is like a benediction from D.W. Griffith. This was Laughton's first and only film and it looks like the work of one of those pioneering visionaries. Laughton was an intuitive director of stage actors and he brought some of that stage craft to this film, not unlike Orson Welles

importing his own hyper-eccentric stage direction into his own movies. (**THE MAGNIFICENT AMBERSONS** was also shot by Cortez.)

It's clear who were the creative forces behind this film, right? Not so fast, says Preston Neal Jones, author of the new book *HEAVEN AND HELL TO PLAY WITH*, which chronicles the genesis of this work of cinematic revelation. According to producer Paul Gregory, "I think there's no way Charles Laughton could have gone down in history as a director... He had an enormous amount of help on this picture, an enormous amount, and many of the decisions were not his." He goes on to say, "He directed the actors, and he worked with Stanley Cortez... but until that moment of decision... all the other stuff was done for Charles..." Gregory's implication is that **HUNTER** was only the sum of its parts and that the lucky Laughton was, for much of the production, just tagging along. That is, until film editor Robert Golden chimes in: "Laughton was the primary instrument in every phase of this picture."

The confusion mounts. We know that James Agee's work, which includes *LET US NOW PRAISE FAMOUS MEN* (with photographs by Walker Evans), *A DEATH IN THE FAMILY* and *LETTERS TO FATHER FLYE*, is brimming with a sensuous evocation of religious faith and the secret lives of children, both primary themes of **THE NIGHT OF THE HUNTER**. Paul Gregory again: "Agee became so incapacitated that we had to skip it... Laughton wrote the script." Jones continues, "On the one hand, there is no reason to doubt the original existence of [the] Agee first draft... on the other hand... Laughton, at least for a time, kept Agee on the payroll and at the typewriter. To what degree he served as Laughton's writer and to what degree as his stenographer, we can never know..." On the one hand, on the other hand... *infinitem*.

Jones calls into question the contributions of the primary creators of this film, the writer and the director and just who is responsible for what remains a frustratingly unanswered, and perhaps unanswerable, question. Structured as an oral history, *HEAVEN AND HELL TO PLAY WITH* is culled from first hand interviews and other existing biographical sources. These are interviews with actors and producers who are famously

unreliable. Paid to be entertaining, they're happy to extend that artistic license to their memories, reading from the scripts of their lives and constantly re-writing them. As a result, the book is tapestry of undependable narration and, for once, the truth doesn't lie somewhere in-between, because there are too many in-betweens.

Combining these interviews into a group diary is welcome and the resulting anecdotes and gossip are terrifically entertaining. But, as Harold Bloom said when contemplating a tidal wave of arbitrary anecdotes and details, "So much information, but where is the wisdom?" A writer needs to give us a reason to read his words instead of some other guy who had access to the same information... it's what separates an artist from a court recorder. In this regard, most of the characters in *HEAVEN AND HELL TO PLAY WITH* are contemplated in a Hollywood swimming pool full of anecdotes and details... and they remain unfocused and underdeveloped. Without Jones stepping in to fill in the blanks, to question or ascertain what these witnesses claim, their portraits remain limited by their own words. In at least one instance the book is successful; Jones aims a shotgun of anecdotes at Charles Laughton and enough of them find their mark to conjure a picture of a vain, generous and passionate artist—a man who brought together many disparate artists to create a singular work of art. Jones clearly loves **THE NIGHT OF THE HUNTER** and he too brings together many different artists to tell their story... but in *HEAVEN AND HELL TO PLAY WITH*, those voices have drowned each other out... and Jones remains uninvolved in orchestrating them into something more harmonious, a proper chorus.



Robert Mitchum as one of the greatest movie monsters of all time—Harry Powell, the pig-stickin' preacherman of THE NIGHT OF THE HUNTER.

THE MUMMY UNWRAPPED: SCENES LEFT ON UNIVERSAL'S CUTTING ROOM FLOOR

By Thomas Feramisco.

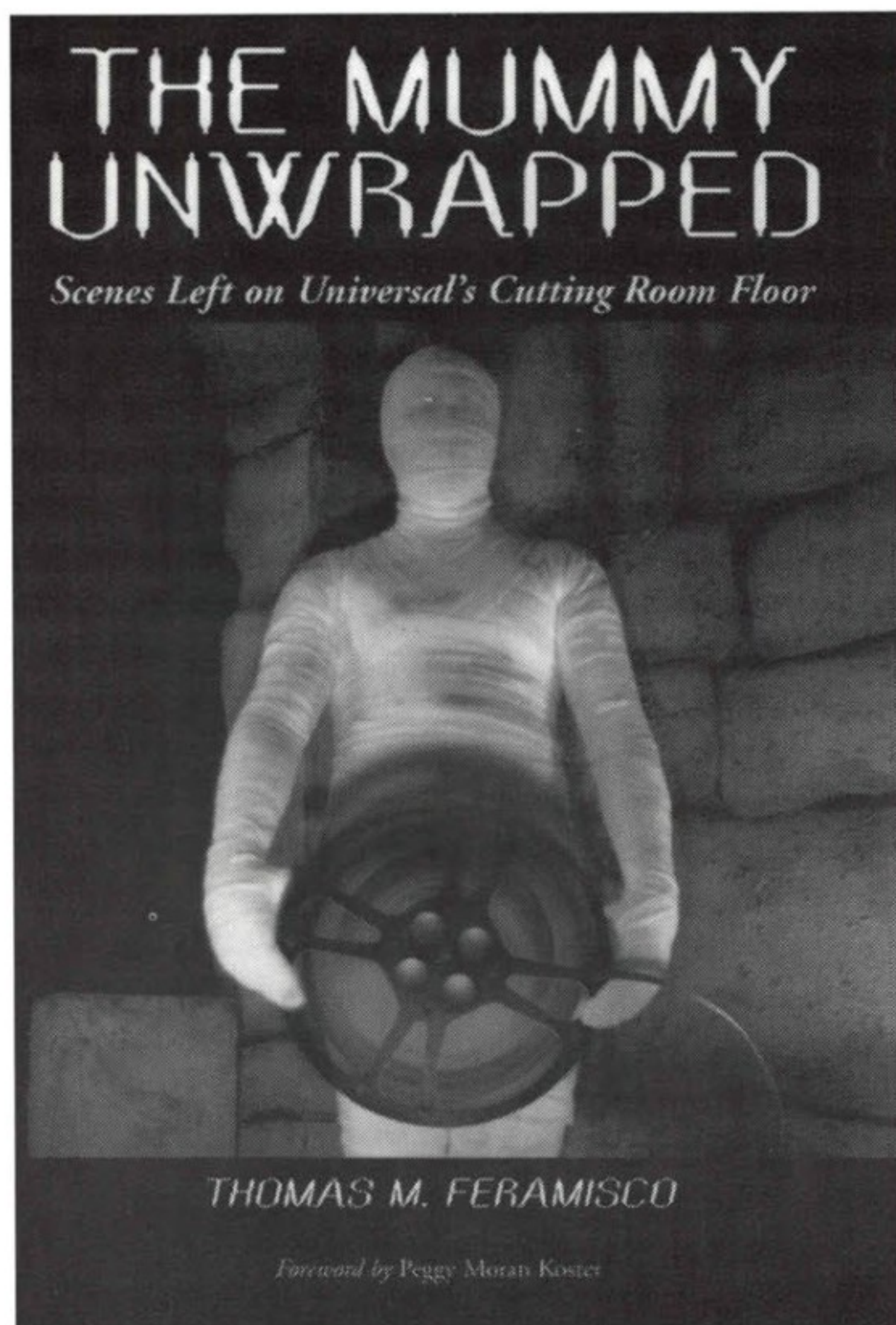
McFarland & Company, Inc., Box 611,
Jefferson NC 28640; www.mcfarlandpub.com;
1-800-253-2187; 232 pp., \$35 (hardcover) plus
\$4.00 shipping from the publisher.

Reviewed by Anthony Ambrogio

The success of **THE MUMMY** (1999) and **THE MUMMY RETURNS** (2001) have had a salutary effect on mummy-film scholarship. Following on the bandaged heels of Cowie & Johnson's **THE MUMMY IN FACT, FICTION AND FILM** [reviewed VW 92:72], **THE MUMMY UNWRAPPED** devotes itself entirely to Universal's Kharis series. Some may feel we need an in-depth examination of these four programmers like we need a learned treatise on the **INNER SANCTUM** series, (hey, it could happen!) but Kharis fans will probably shout, "Thank Karnak!" Author Thomas Feramisco is one such fan: his Preface explains that, when he first saw the Universal horror classics as a kid, it was Kharis—not Dracula, Frankenstein's monster, or Im-Ho-Tep—that gave him nightmares. As with so many film books, then, this one is a labor of love.

Feramisco's approach is akin to MagicImage Books' short-lived Universal Filmscripts Series (c. 1990), whose reprints of the movies' screenplays (including deleted or never-filmed scenes) featured introductions by historians like Gregory Mank, which mentioned the changes between scenario and finished film. Instead of complete screenplays, Feramisco offers more analysis. His book reproduces script pages that either weren't shot or were excised from the Kharis films, interspersing those excerpts with critical commentary, comparing text to film and discussing the differences. Thus, he offers a fresh perspective on the series.

THE MUMMY'S HAND (1940) is the entry that diverges most often from its script. Some of the excisions are minor, eliminating "characterization" bits which might have fleshed out roles but slowed the pacing. Others are matters of mayhem, such as an episode near the end when the old priests from the picture's beginning return to chastise Andoheb for his sacrilege and Kharis kills them. Feramisco's evidence suggests that this sequence was shot but (perhaps because there was no time for a necessary retake) cut from the print. "Such a truly chilling sequence," he says, "would have not only added to Kharis' screen time, but would



have doubled the Mummy's body count (from two to four)."

To show how the project evolved, Feramisco describes **HAND**'s very different earlier drafts. Many early scenes, he notes, "bear similarities to **DRACULA** (1931)"—which may be fitting, since the 1932 **MUMMY** often feels like "**DRACULA** with Sand." The script describes a mountain road, a horse-drawn carriage directed by a bat, and an Egyptian temple with spider webs, rats, and bugs. "If this were any closer to **DRACULA**," the author notes, "we would soon learn the Egyptian's name is really Renfield..." Feramisco doesn't make the connection, but, since Universal—determined not to go over budget any more on horror films—had pinched pennies with **HAND** by reusing expensive sets from **GREEN HELL** (1940) and incorporating flashback footage from **THE MUMMY**—their front office may have instructed screenwriters to incorporate opportunities for recycling footage from the Bela Lugosi classic. The script looked forward as well as backward; its Kharis is more athletic than the one we see on the screen, anticipating Christopher Lee's interpretation in the 1959 Hammer remake.

THE MUMMY'S TOMB (1942) and **THE MUMMY'S GHOST** (1944) were pretty much filmed as written, so the changes from script to movie aren't great, but Feramisco dutifully notes them. His **TOMB** chapter shows the screenplay's (and finished film's) emphasis on Kharis's shadow, which makes us wonder why the movie wasn't called **THE MUMMY'S SHADOW**, a title that makes more sense.

Feramisco also judges the films' relative merits. **HAND** is the best, in his estimation, but **GHOST** comes close—unfortunately, for reasons that badly denigrate the quality of his research: "Reasons being, Ramsay Ames is absolutely gorgeous. Second, the Mummy has much more screen time in **GHOST** than in **HAND**. Third, Ramsay Ames is gorgeous. Fourth, the Mummy shows greater emotion here than in the other entries. Fifth, Ramsay Ames is gorgeous."

Feramisco cheerfully acknowledges the inconsistencies and continuity errors from one Kharis film to another (some of which Tim Lucas initially pointed out in these pages; see VW 20:17) and charitably dismisses many gaffes—eg., Babe Jenson becoming Babe Hanson in **TOMB**: "Let's just assume Babe might have changed his name to throw any succeeding priest of Karnak off the track, and let it go at that. Besides, when vampire hunter Van Helsing's name was mysteriously changed to Von Helsing for **DRACULA**'s sequel, **DRACULA'S DAUGHTER**, few eyebrows were raised." One movie's error should not be used to excuse another, but rather to indicate a certain inattention typical of the studio in question. Feramisco goes on to suggest that, although Andoheb is alive again in **TOMB** after definitely being killed in **HAND**, fans who've imagined his *second* resurrection in **GHOST** haven't carefully checked the credits, where he's listed as *High Priest*—ie., *not* the Andoheb of the previous films.

If you think that the locale shift from New England to Louisiana for no discernable reason is a gross inconsistency in 1944's **MUMMY'S CURSE** (Feramisco suggests it was deliberate, to inject some atmosphere into the picture), you should see the original treatment for **CURSE**, "The Mummy's Return." In this, Kharis's remains are put to work as a scarecrow (echoes of 1942's **TALES OF MANHATTAN**), then as a sideshow exhibit (shades of 1944's **HOUSE OF FRANKENSTEIN**) before being revived to rampage until a cyclone destroys him. It's an instructive example of how screenplays mutate, as most readers would discover for themselves without Feramisco's self-endorsement, "In the quest to unearth anything



*Lon Chaney and John Carradine star in **THE MUMMY'S GHOST**, one of the many Universal horror films whose deleted scenes are explored in **THE MUMMY UNWRAPPED**.*

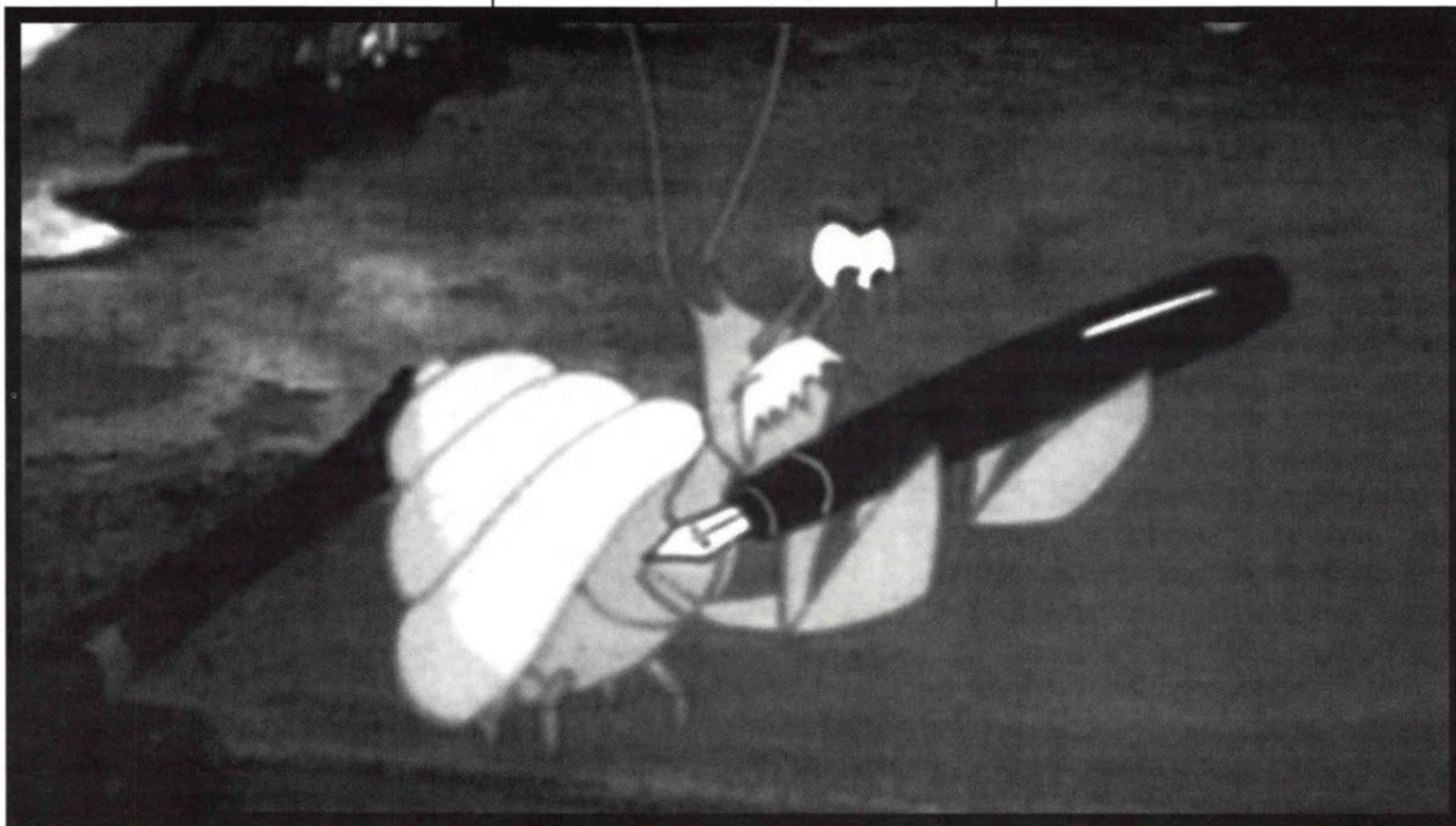
new from the Mummy movies, some may find 'The Mummy's Return' to be the most fascinating chapter in this book."

Even a devotee can say only so much about the Kharis films, so Feramisco pads his last 100 pages with bios and filmographies of the series' performers and major crew members. His serviceable entries don't cover any especially new ground and often read like press releases (which makes their content suspect)—a fact confirmed by his bibliography, which lists a score of "Studio Biographies" as sources. Most disappointingly, considering that this is a book about *textual* film history, Feramisco offers no biographical information pertaining to the series' *writers*—especially Griffin Jay, the person most responsible for the first three Kharis films. What was he like—the man who split **THE MUMMY**'s Im-Ho-Tep in two: Mummy (Kharis) and High Priest (Andoheb/Mehemet Bey/Yousef Bey)? And why couldn't he keep his own names straight from entry to entry (Jenson/Hanson; Karnak/Arkam)?

Alas, this book may unwrap the Mummy, but it leaves much about the series still to be unravelled.



THE LETTERBOX



RAMSEY'S RUNES

May I add to the excellent double reviews of **NIGHT/CURSE OF THE DEMON** [VW 93:26] by Bill Cooke and Kim Newman? I take Kim to be saying that **NIGHT OF THE DEMON** was always uncut in Britain. In fact, when it was submitted to the British censor on 25 June 1957, it ran 95m 40s but cuts were required. Unfortunately, in those days the BBFC didn't record details of cuts or, apparently, even the length of deleted footage. However, when I first saw the film (in Liverpool in early 1961, as the lower half of a double bill with **THE TINGLER**), it was the 81m version, though titled **NIGHT OF THE DEMON**. I don't know when that edit first

went into distribution here, but it has always been shown since, most recently at Pictureville in Bradford and the Cornerhouse in Manchester.

Bill Cooke misses one important difference [between the two versions], in Chapter 4 ("The Flight to London") of both versions on the DVD. The scene in **CURSE** runs 1m 5s longer. It begins with Holden calling a stewardess to ask for an eye mask. She offers him a pill instead, to which he responds "No thanks, I'm trying to cut down." Further restlessness on his part causes Joanna Harrington to ask to change her seat, but the stewardess tells her the flight is full. The longer version makes it more likely that she and Holden would

quickly recognize each other at her uncle's funeral, I think.

Ramsey Campbell
Merseyside, England

NIGHT OF THE ERRATA

Just wanted to send a short note about what could be a mistake in Bill Cooke's review of **CURSE OF THE DEMON** [VW 93:27]. He states that Columbia producer Hal E. Chester changed the original UK title from **NIGHT OF THE DEMON** to **CURSE...** "so

Crusty the Hermit Crab
(voiced by Paul Frees)
examines a dad-burned
fountain pen in *THE*
INCREDIBLE MR. LIMPET.

it wouldn't be confused with the same year's **NIGHT OF THE IGUANA**." However, John Huston's superb B&W psychosexual drama wouldn't hit theater screens until 1964! A minor error in an otherwise excellent piece!

David D. Duncan
Nashville TN

Bill Cooke Responds: *I checked, and my source for that little bit of misinformation was Danny Peary's CULT MOVIES 2. He quotes screenwriter Charles Bennett as stating that Columbia changed the title so the film would not be confused with NIGHT OF THE IGUANA. Strangely, Peary adds "(1964)" following the title—wish I had caught that!—but doesn't correct Bennett! I thought that maybe Columbia had bought the rights to the play, but not yet made the film... Alas, the play was first performed in 1961!*

VAGUE INSIDE INFORMATION

In response to Shane M. Dallmann's review of **CARNIVAL OF BLOOD** and **CURSE OF THE HEADLESS HORSEMAN** [VW 92:48]: Not wanting to take anything away from Leonard Kirtman's sterling and unique reputation as a purveyor of rather well-wrought hard and softcore "girly" movies, but he did not direct **CURSE OF THE HEADLESS HORSEMAN**. "John Kirkland" was the *nomme de guerre* of a real person; perhaps it was his real name but, gee, a fella is entitled to be a little forgetful after all these years. At any rate, he was an Angeleno and Vietnam vet whose aspirations to acting led him to appear in many a porno film and to become a first time "writer" (along with his completely uncredited partner) and

"director" on **HORSEMAN**—if, indeed, those are the correct terms for what went on. The "script," such as it was, was largely improvised and film was constructed by the editor ("Jeremiah Hayerling"—also a *nomme de guerre*) literally transcribing the existing dialogue and action and trying to make sense of the whole thing.

The film was shot in 35mm color and edited in 16mm B&W. Kirtman wanted to break into all the different exploitation genres and maybe hit the big time. His offices were in various places in NY City and, at one time or another, lots of upwardly mobile film folks worked for him. It was rumored, indeed, that John G. Avildsen (**ROCKY**) worked on **CARNIVAL OF BLOOD** as cinematographer and director, but I doubt very much that he would confirm that, if it were true.

X.L. Paradyme
e-mail

MORE ON THE OTHER WELLES

Thanks to your great double article on **LADY FRANKENSTEIN** [VW 78:22], I bought the cut version and watched it last night. It is really the only legitimate descendant of the Fisher Frankenstein films that I've seen. Obviously, Mel Welles knew those films. Take the famous hand-biting scene, where the husband first spies on his wife committing major boinkage with his future body, then murders the guy, thereby stimulating her climax. This is what we call a classic scene.

The scene acts out a sick fantasy underlying all of classical cinema, which is exposed shamelessly in key films of the tradition like **NOTORIOUS** and **UNDER CAPRICORN**, **THE 1000 EYES OF DR. MABUSE**, **IRMA LA**

DOUCE, **Pierrot Le Fou**, **THE RULES OF THE GAME**, **THE IMMORTAL STORY**, **THE TWO FACES OF DR. JEKYLL**, etc. Given the way directors always used male surrogates to make love to their actresses ("the castrated *metteur-en-scène* complex," as Jean-Pierre Oudart calls it in his *CAHIERS DU CINEMA* article on **FOUR NIGHTS OF A DREAMER**), it's understandable that this perennial cinematic depth perversion should find its ultimate metaphor in the pseudo-science of brain transplantation, and its ultimate avatar in the figure of Frankenstein.

Certainly the transplant in **FRANKENSTEIN MUST BE DESTROYED** was already pointing in that direction, but Welles took it over the top by making both male figures puppets in a woman's plan, which is designed to give *her* pleasure. The composite man she has created for this purpose strangles her at the end—something few males in the audience would be inclined to do at that point. Ostensibly, the husband-assistant-lab-rat has realized that Lady F. doesn't love him and is using him to her own ends, so he murders her, but the act is so irrational that it can only be explained by reference to the tradition I've been outlining: he is reclaiming the "power" of the castrated *metteur-en-scène*, even though what he is trying to reclaim has already been revealed as a mirage by Lady F's transgressive actions.

Subsequent attempts to put classical cinema together again have been equally futile—it all came to an end, in a manner of speaking, with **LADY FRANKENSTEIN**. Terence Fisher acknowledged this in his last film, **FRANKENSTEIN AND THE MONSTER FROM HELL**, which spells out the complex every bit as clinically as Welles' film had,

but with more humor, and more visual style. Fisher leaves Frankenstein in a madhouse, straightening up after his latest catastrophe and nattering about "getting on with it"—a dead end for the character, for the series and for classical cinema. I have always loved **FRANKENSTEIN AND THE MONSTER FROM HELL** more than any of the other Fisher Frankensteins because of that glacial sense of a tradition coming to an end. Thank you for showing me the missing link in the process.

Bill Krohn
Los Angeles CA

*Few things are as gratifying as receiving a letter of thoughts that one of our articles has excited in the mind of a reader, and when that reader is a professional critic and can put those thoughts into vivid language, the effect is doubly gratifying. I was so pleased with Bill's letter that I forwarded it to Mel Welles, who wrote back: "Many thanks for the sharing. It is, indeed, a great kick to see the depth of analysis that Bill goes to in dissecting the Frankenstein syndrome in general and **LADY FRANKENSTEIN** in particular. The Gothic horror associated with the Frankenstein monster is to me a true reflection of the daily expression of human frailty. A creator, his creature and the eventuality of becoming a victim to the monster he created. Isn't that what we all do? Create our monsters and become victim to what we create? Anyhow, my sterling film archivist, keep up the great work you do. You make a difference. Peace, Mel."*

IT DOESN'T PAY TO BE A TEENAGER ANYMORE

It seems that **TEENAGE FANTASIES** was available from SWV on a double feature tape with **SAN FRANCISCO BALL**.

However, as of February 1999, any films that seemingly contain underage performers have been dropped from the SWV catalog.

Likewise, any title containing the words "teenage", "young" or "innocent" has been discontinued. **TEENAGE FANTASIES/SAN FRANCISCO BALL** used to be XXX double feature #5780, a catalog number which is now assigned to **RENE BOND'S SEX FANTASIES/CREAM RINSE**.

Matt Allison
Denver CO


*I guess that means we won't be seeing the **SCHOOLGIRL REPORT** movies here in the US anytime soon...*

THE GUY WHO FLAGGED ME

In reading your excellent reviews of the Fox **OUR MAN FLINT/IN LIKE FLINT** DVDs [VW 92:40], I noticed that you were puzzled over the Austin Powers cover blurb on **IN LIKE FLINT**. The quote comes from the second Austin Powers movie, **THE SPY WHO SHAGGED ME**. In the opening sequence, when Austin is on honeymoon with Vanessa Kensington, he flips on the television just in time to see the film's opening credits, to which he exclaims "**IN LIKE FLINT!** My favorite movie!"

I also think that this is made reference to somewhere else... perhaps in one of the tie-in books (which is my hunch, but I can't find a copy to verify at the moment), or in one of the supplements on the DVD.

Aleck Bennett
e-mail

Thanks, Aleck. I may be "in" with my knowledge of Flint, but Austin is not one of my powers. 

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